

An even heavier workload

Exodus 5:10-6:1

Sometimes we try and do the right thing but things go from bad to worse instead of getting better. A young couple go to a mission field in India full of hope that as the gospel is preached they'll start seeing converts and begin to plant churches. Instead, after 5 years of relatively fruitless labour, few converts are made. The missionary's wife contracts a serious illness and the couple are forced to return home.

Parents can also have similar disappointing experiences. They try to do the right thing, train up a child in the way he would go, and hope to realise the promise that he will not depart from it. But instead there is sadness because the child squanders the parents love and turns away from the Lord.

Moses and the Israelites had an experience like that.

Moses had returned with signs and wonders and promises from God but instead of life improving for God's people, they had gotten worse.

Perhaps we all have experience like this at times. What to do when things go wrong?

1. Recognise where the real problem lies

Just as it looked as though the Israelites were about to be saved; when God's servant had gone to Pharaoh to demand their freedom, the Israelites were afflicted with even worse oppression than before.

With this last edict from Pharaoh forcing the Hebrew slaves to get their own straw, conditions had become unbearable. Pharaoh didn't care about the Lord, or the Lord's people. All he cared about was his own fame and glory which he expected his massive building programs would give him.

Furthermore, as far as everyone living in Egypt was concerned, Pharaoh's word was law! God said let my people go! Pharaoh thought, "sure they can go; go get their own straw!" So that's what happened. Because they needed straw for millions and bricks the Hebrews had to travel far and wide in a hot dry land to find enough straw to keep up with the brick makers. If their quotas fell the Egyptian task masters would round up the Israelite foremen and beat them. When the foremen complained to Pharaoh, he didn't bother to investigate. He didn't visit the kilns or consult his employment relations adviser. He had no sympathy for the Hebrew foremen at all and just accused them of being lazy, very lazy!

One historian records this conversation between an Egyptian and his son, describing the condition of the Hebrew slaves and saying, "their kidneys suffer because they are in the sun with no clothes on. Their hands are torn by the work and they have to knead all sorts of muck." Well under those conditions we could imagine that many will die from dehydration and exhaustion.

The slavery in Egypt is a picture of human slavery to sin. It says in Romans 6:6 that until Christ sets us free, we remain slaves to sin. In verse 19 we find that even the parts of our

bodies can become slaves to impurity and lawlessness. Simon the sorcerer who wanted to have power to work miracles was described as being “in the “bonds of iniquity” (Acts 8:23). The devil takes men captive to do his will according to 2 Timothy 2:26.

The truth is that apart from the saving work of Christ we would all be captives; slaves to one thing or another.

It could be a bad temper, an addiction, selfishness or gossip. How many people aren't in prison because they couldn't control their anger and have caused grievous bodily harm or even murder as a result. Someone who is mastered by lust can't resist temptation but gives in time and time again. Then there are those who are never satisfied never content and enslaved to making money or acquiring more and more wealth and material goods. And then there are the gossips who can't control their tongues and are divisive or controversial in company.

Just as the Israelites were enslaved to Pharaoh we are by nature enslaved to sin and just as Pharaoh made the Israelites work harder and made their lives more and more miserable so too is sin a harsh task master. Sin is deceptive, it promises pleasure, laughter, riches and glamour but delivers misery.

Take pornography as an example. In a recent article in Faith in Focus Pastor Josh Flinn has shown how widespread the problem has become especially since the arrival of smart phones and hi-speed internet. Research by organisations like Covenant Eyes, (they provide filtering and accountability programs) has also shown that those who fall into temptation get badly addicted with adverse effect on their minds, their work life and their family life, Marriages suffer, productivity goes down and it often leads to other forms of sexual sin.

Like Pharaoh, the pornographer is a harsh task master, it offers nothing but misery. The more people are trapped in it the more miserable they become, the less content they are and the more self-loathing they experience. And you know when it comes to those trapped in sin, Satan doesn't want to let go but like Pharaoh he tightens his grip even more. He wants to trap us completely in sin.

This is man's underlying problem and the sooner people realise it the sooner they see the need for a saviour, Lord willing. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2 all of us would remain “dead in our trespasses and sins, living according to the course of this world according to the prince of the power of the air and according to the spirit working in the sons of disobedience and indulging the sinful desires of the flesh and mind.”

That's the natural human condition since the fall.

We need someone like Moses to deliver us from slavery to sin. What we need is a saviour Jesus Christ who came for that every reason. In Hebrews 2 it says that Jesus came to deliver all those who through fear and death were subject to life-long slavery.

According to Revelation 1:5 Jesus has delivered us from our sins by his blood and makes us to be a kingdom and priests to our God and Father. When we come to Jesus and confess our sin and ask for forgiveness, we are no longer under sin's *condemnation*. The penalty for our

sin has been paid by Christ's blood shed on the cross. When we come to Jesus in true faith he also gives us his spirit with one of the fruits of the Spirit being self-control. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives God also delivers us from sins *domination*. We begin to win the war against Satan and sin. Gradually the bonds which hold us in sins grip are loosened till in the end we become more than conquerors through him who loved us. Even so.....

2. Satan doesn't give up easily and problems don't necessarily go away overnight.

We know that even after the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt and had escaped from captivity, they grumbled and they were tempted into sin again and complained to Moses that they wanted to go back to Egypt rather than go forward into the Promised Land. And here in chapter 5 when the Israelite foremen were beaten by the Egyptian task masters they didn't appeal to the Lord through Moses but appealed to Pharaoh instead!

I suppose we can understand how that might have happened. As foremen they will have been given some responsibility and shown some respect by their Egyptian bosses. And so when they were beaten they thought that there must have been some mistake! So they went to the big boss, Pharaoh and asked him. "Why are they beating us?" They called themselves in Pharaoh's presence "your servants" That's how used to their circumstances they had become. They didn't yet see themselves as God servants but Pharaohs loyal subjects who deserved to be treated better, even though they longed to be free of their enslavement.

Well they should have known better than to expect sympathy from Pharaoh whose heart was doubly hard! Pharaoh was never going to be the solution, he was the problem! No good appealing to the devil for salvation.

Similarly we as Christians continue to struggle with sin because Satan doesn't give up easily and the catechism say that our greatest enemies are temptation, the lure of the world and the lust of the flesh. But the point here is that it's no good asking one of the devil's representatives to help us or set us free.

It's like trying to cure cancer with pain killers or turning to drugs and alcohol to drown one's sorrows. Neither can today's secular psychologists help with the misery sin causes. All they do is convince you that you are not a sinner but that your problems are the result of harsh parenting or something constitutional in your make-up. You were born that way so just be true to who you are. Don't try and change it and here some tranquilizers to help you with your anxiety. That'd be their advice, generally speaking.

Well, all of us were born with one constitutional flaw or another because we've all inherited Adam's original sin. Yours could be lust or covetousness or overeating! Are these constitutional defects to be accepted or are they to be battled against and overcome by God's grace through the process of sanctification? Where must we go to overcome our defects? To Christ who died for our sins and then to the word of God in prayer.

Another one of Satan's strategies is to blame someone else for your misery. This is what the foremen did when they left Pharaoh in a bad mood because he didn't care in the least about

their predicament. Well Moses and Aaron were waiting for them as they left Pharaoh's palace and as soon as these angry foremen saw them they went on the attack. Verse 21 "May the Lord look upon you and judge you for you have made is odious in Pharaoh's sight to put a sword in their hand to kill us"

This is again a natural sinful response; blame someone else rather than identify the true source of your trouble. The foremen took their frustrations out on Moses and Aaron. Sadly that was the beginning of a pattern we see in all of Israel's history. The Israelites rejected God's prophets until they eventually rejected God's own son and had him crucified.

It does go to show how patient God is with us and how graciously he deals with us he knows our weaknesses and frailties and is compassionate to all who fear him. It also shows how great a sacrifice Jesus death on the cross was. How he paid for all our sins, past, present and future and that basis God will see us right at the end.

The point is , beware of faithless attempts at problem solving such as seeking help or advice from sources hostile to God or by attempting to shift blame.

3., The godly response when things go wrong.

We see that response in the mediator Moses.

We see in verse 22 that right after the foremen's complained, Moses turned to the Lord in prayer. "O Lord, why have you brought harm to this people? Why did you ever send me? Ever since I came to pharaoh to speak in your name he has done harm to this people. And you have not delivered them at all!?"

Again we can see Moses own weaknesses in that prayer. He seems to be accusing God and regretting his own role in it. As well as that Moses seems to be quite impatient because in the chapters that follow it becomes clear that God had the situation in hand. Chapter 6:1 shows again how the Lord would deliver his people. It was under the compulsion of the Ten Plagues that Pharaoh would finally drive the Israelites out of Egypt.

Even so Moses calling out to the Lord was an act of faith and that is what is important here. In moments of doubt and discouragement his immediate impulse was to call out to the God.

This is a good lesson for us all. When we are in any kind of trouble we must take all our troubles to the Lord in prayer. God has made that possible through Jesus Christ who has paid for all of our sins. We may not always know what to say our prayer may not even be very articulate or accurate as was the case with Moses. But the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit (Romans 8:16 and the Spirit intercedes for us with groaning's too deep for words. (Romans 8:26) Like Moses we can also ask God questions as the Psalms also teach us to do, such as: "Lord how long? Lord why am I in this bad situation? Lord what are you doing here?"

This is what people of faith do. Abraham remained childless for many years after God promised him a son and on one occasion he asked the Lord, "What should I do, for I continue childless?" (Gen 15:2). Job had many questions for God such as well such as, "Lord why do you hide yourself? Am I your enemy? (Job 7:11) When the prophet Jeremiah was put in jail

for preaching God's word he also expressed his grief over the matter to the Lord in Prayer. "O Lord you have deceived me, you have overcome me, I have become a laughing stock all day long everyone mocks me." (Jeremiah 20:7-18)

Jeremiah preached that judgment was coming but no one believed him they just laughed at him, but what he said was true because in 586BC towards the end of Jeremiah's ministry Jerusalem fell and the temple was destroyed.

So if you ever have any questions or concerns about what God is doing go ahead and ask.

The Lord will always answer our prayers one way or another. In Moses case we see his answer in 6:1. Pharaoh would not only let the Israelites go but he would drive them out. The all-powerful all wise everlasting God had everything under control.

That means that when trouble comes we can also be sure that God hasn't lost control of our situation either. God is working all things out for his own glorious purposes. For example sometimes He allows us to experience trouble in order to teach us patience. At other times he may be teaching us faith and obedience. The promise is that he will deliver us from our troubles one way or another.

For example God could have delivered Israel by God could have instantly by dispensing with Pharaoh there and then if he so decreed. But God chose another way through the plagues so that the greatness of his power and majesty over all the forces of evil would be evident.

So the answer to any problem, we might have is to bring it to the Lord in prayer and then to trust the Lord that in his time and according to his perfect and holy will he will answer those prayers.

And we can be certain that his answer will always work out to his glory and our salvation just as it was for Moses and the Israelites.

So when things go wrong recognise where the real problem lies. The real problem is sin; ours or the sins of other against us and the solution to our problems can't be found by going to the source of the problem or by attempting to mask sin with other sins . The only solution to our problem is by going to the Father in prayer in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ; the only one who can deliver people from enslavement to both its penalty and domination of sin.

Amen