

Who is the Lord?

Exodus 5:1-14

I wonder what kind of response we would get if we did a survey in the streets of Whanganui and asked the question, “Who is the Lord? I suppose some might laugh and say “I am!” Others might say “Jacinda” (no disrespect to the current prime minister intended). Someone else might just shrug their shoulders and ask who *is* the Lord?

So who is Lord? Is there a higher authority our politicians ought to consider when it comes to considering legislation like the End of life choices bill?” Yes! Do they? Can’t see it.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is Lord yet many resist him but those to whom he has revealed himself serve him. That’s the theme of this passage we’ll look at it in three parts.

1. Who is the Lord? This was the question Pharaoh asked of Moses and Aaron when they made their request to him. At the end of chapter 4 Moses returned to Egypt and met his brother Aaron. Together they went to the elders of Israel and told them everything the Lord had said to Moses and performed the miracles God had given Moses. According to chapter 4:31 the people believed Moses and they worshipped the Lord.

Moses and Aaron then went to Pharaoh and told him what the Lord had said. “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, “let my people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the Wilderness.” The Israelites were God’s chosen people and he wasn’t going to let them slave away for Pharaoh till they were reduced to nothing. He wanted them to be free to serve the Lord.

Pharaoh refused saying “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and beside I will not let Israel go.” Moses and Aaron then made an attempt to help Pharaoh understand the situation. The NASB translation includes the word “please” in the text which makes Moses and Aarons request look apologetic and as if they appealing to Pharaoh’s sympathies if he had any.

But a literal word for word translation from the Hebrew is, “let us go now”. Moses and Aaron weren’t pleading with Pharaoh but simply answering his question “Who is the Lord?” and telling him that YHWH, (the Lord) was the Hebrews God and that it was not an unreasonable request to give slaves some time off for religious feast days. The brothers also warned Pharaoh that if God’s people weren’t allowed to serve the Lord their God then the consequences would be disastrous. There would be death by disease and the sword.”

As the text shows Pharaoh’s response was one of complete disregard for the Israelites and their God. Besides he still needed many thousands of bricks for all of his building projects. According to one Egyptian archaeology site, roughly 3 million mud bricks were used to build Ahmentop 3rd palatial complex at Malquata in Egypt, quite likely one of several big projects on the go at the time. That’s all Pharaoh cared about; his own ambition and glory.

So Pharaoh’s response revealed three things that are common to those who do not believe

The first is *ignorance*. Pharaoh reveals his own ignorance by raising the question “who is the Lord?” Not that he wanted to know the Lord. He wasn’t waiting for an informed explanation. His response was sarcastic. As if to say well who is this God of a nation of slaves. He can’t be very powerful if his people are all slaves! As far as Pharaoh was concerned he was god. He had a great kingdom and the people belonging to weaker gods as his slaves to prove it. Furthermore, according to ancient Egyptian tradition the Creator made himself king of his creation on earth and the Pharaohs were his descendants and successors. This is why such elaborate palaces and tombs such as the pyramids were built in their honour. Pharaohs deluded claim to be divine was also seen in the way he treated the Hebrews with complete contempt as his servants and answerable to him not to their Lord.

The only remedy for Pharaoh’s ignorance was for the Lord to reveal himself to Pharaoh directly. This is what every unbeliever needs. Those who remain ignorant of God, who ignore him, disobey his instructions, shake their fists at God, follow their own desires have made themselves lord of their lives. But it’s an illusion. There is only one God and whoever rejects him is heading for disaster.

The second problem those who do not know the Lord have is *resistance*. Pharaoh was resistant to God’s authority. That’s because faith is emotional as well as intellectual. Pharaoh had a problem of the heart. Pharaoh said “who is the Lord that I should *obey his voice*?” We were reminded at the recent evangelism conference that people are hardwired for God. Everyone has a sense of the divine. Plus, there are many indications (theistic proofs) of the existence of God all around us. The apostle Paul wrote about that in Romans 1:18. “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men *who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*. For that which is known about God is evident in them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen ...through what has been made so that they are without excuse.”

That basically means that there is always an element of *spiritual rebellion* in someone who say they don’t know God. They don’t really want to know or obey God. Even the most hardened atheist knows deep down that there is a God. But he suppresses that inbuilt sense of the divine! Why? Because he wants to keep on sinning. He chooses ignorance because he wants to keep wearing the crown himself and be lord of his own life.

Those who have trouble in deciding whether or not they want to be a Christian may argue that it’s an intellectual thing. They may say that there are mistakes in the Bible, deny the resurrection and say the miracles are too far-fetched and so-on. But Paul says it is a deeper problem, he says by their unrighteousness they suppress the truth. (Romans 1: 18) It’s a heart problem and a problem of resisting God and resisting the truth. It may be that they love their sin more than God, whether that be sexual sin, selfish ambition or wanting to live for material gain.

So Pharaoh rejected God’s command let my people go because he was a) ignorant of God b) resistant to God but c) also *hateful* towards God and his people. We see that in verses 6-9. The same day Moses and Aaron met with Pharaoh, Pharaoh went over to the task

masters and foremen on the building sites and demanded that the Hebrew slaves work harder. From now on they had to find their own straw and still make the same amount of bricks! This was tyrannical and oppressive and just another example of someone who is at enmity with God and oppresses God's people.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:7 "the mind set on the flesh is hostile towards God."

Jesus said that his disciples could expect to be mistreated. "You will be hated for my name sake but the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22)

Sometimes such persecution is violent as it was under Pharaoh in Egypt and as it is today. There are frequent reports from organisations such as the Barnabas fund citing violent persecution. The last one told of a young Christian convert fighting for his life after being beaten by three Muslim men in Kyrgyzstan.

Here in New Zealand the attacks are more subtle. For example, Christian ideals are excluded from public education and political debate. The church is often misrepresented by the media. Sometimes Christians are mocked by workmates or classmates. Some because of adverse personal experiences are negative saying "who is the Lord anyway what has he ever done for me?"

These attitudes is the result of ignorance, resistance and hostility towards God and his people. This can only be overcome by revelation from God which takes me to the second point.

2. God reveals himself as the Lord. The difference between belief and unbelief is to know Jesus as Lord to know God as the creator of the universe and the one whom all people must acknowledge and worship. God revealed had already revealed the answer to Pharaoh's question, "who is the Lord?" at the burning bush. The Lord is YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Holy, self-existent, eternal God. He is the Father of Israel and Israel's true son our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ salvation would come to the whole world for all who believe. This God would lead his people out of slavery and into the Promised Land. Those who reject him get what they ask for, the just condemnation of God. Those who believe become his servants as Moses and the Israelites did.

We all need to know God and the only place where we can meet God is in his word and with his people. Pharaoh should have taken more time to listen more carefully to Moses and Aaron. Anyone who isn't sure of who God is today should start reading their Bibles. Get to know the creation fall and redemption flow of the Bible story. See how the history of salvation centred in the person and work of the Lord Jesus unfolds. Read the Bible and meet with God's people in worship and at Bible study nights. Anyone who receives good solid teaching from the word of God won't remain ignorant of God for long.

As well as that our task as a church is similar to Moses task. We are to make the true God known. We are to tell people of his love and justice. We are to tell them about his Son. That he is the God who became man, humbled himself to the point of death on the cross for our sin and that he rose again for our justification. We are to tell people that this God of love the creator and redeemer ought to be worshipped and that to refuse to do so is disastrous.

We are to tell them about God's will for our lives which is that all people are called to repent of their sins and unbelief and put their faith in his son. That repentance includes admission of sin, sorrow for sin and turning away from sin. Believing means know who God is, loving him from the heart and being willing to serve him.

And then as well as tell people about Jesus we need to pray! Pray that the Holy Spirit would work together with the word and make it live in people hearts. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit will anyone say Jesus is Lord and live to serve him.

So who is the Lord? God has revealed himself to us, clearly, sufficiently and authoritatively through Christ and the Bible. So, if anyone here is not a Christian and resisting the call of God consider yourself warned. You have heard the promise and demands of the Covenant of Grace. And you have heard the consequences of refusing the Lord. The way to avoid them is simply to accept the truth, repent and believe and begin serving the Lord, because...

3. Those who God accept God as saviour and Lord will also serve him. In verse 1 we read that Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said "Thus says the Lord." It would not have been easy for Moses given his earlier question at the burning bush and then asking the Lord to "please send someone else!" But Moses put aside his doubts and fears and did as God commanded. He went up to the most powerful man in the known world at that time and demanded that he give his entire slave workforce a holiday.

So what happened to Moses?; the doubtful reluctant shepherd who wanted God to send someone else? What changed?

Moses met the living God. He believed God's word and started living out his faith. As he did that he discovered that God's word *is* true and that he *was* able to do what God called him to do.

The same thing happened to Jesus disciples. They were men from all walks of life who met with Jesus. They saw his authority, his ability to heal the sick, his sinless character and obeyed his call to follow. However for three years they struggled with doubts and fears and lack of faith. And, in Jesus greatest hour of need they deserted him. But months later they were back in the streets of Jerusalem and Judea and further a-field *boldly proclaiming the gospel!* Why were they so willing and able to serve where-as before they barely understood what Jesus true mission was?

Like Moses they also had an encounter with God. They saw Christ after his resurrection and were filled with his spirit at Pentecost and went on to serve Him. Another clear example of that was Saul the Pharisee and persecutor of Christians who had an encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Saul made a sharp u-turn there and then and became the apostle Paul and a bold witness for Christ.

The same thing happens to all who receive the call of God on their lives whose lives have been changed by the Spirit of God. We have an encounter with God. It may not be sudden. It may take months or even years before we have a strong faith. It may be there when we are still young. For others the encounter may come when they are older. But when we do come to know Jesus as our Savior and Lord we will want to serve him.

We can do that in any number of ways, for example by using our spiritual gifts to help build the church; by encouraging our family members to also serve the Lord. We can speak to our neighbours about matters of faith or we try not to compromise our Christian convictions by our behaviour.

In fact, this is one of the great themes of the Bible; that God liberates his people in order that they may serve him. Moses was set free from his doubts and fears and served God boldly. The Israelites would also soon be set free from slavery so that they could serve the Lord and become a light to the nations. We have also been freed by God from slavery to sin to serve the Lord. We may not think that we do that very well. We may continue to struggle with selfish desires but by the grace of God we are still here.

Why do we persevere in serving the Lord? It's because Jesus Christ was the only one who ever served God perfectly. He served God to the point of going to the cross for your sins and mine. He has taken that sin from us and is therefore not ashamed to call us brothers.

Do you know this God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Then will you not also serve him?

Amen.