**GOD SAYS, ‘LET MY PEOPLE GO!’**

April 25, 2021

Exodus 5:1-6:12

Key verse 6:6 “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.”

As we learned in the last passage, Moses thought that he was somebody at the age of 40. But next 40 years he learned that he was nobody. Then at the age of 80 God called him when he was totally broken and in deep despair. For the next 40 years, he learned what an amazing thing God can do with nobody. Today, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh in obedience to God and delivered God’s message, “Let my people go.” The key word in this passage is the little word “I.” Three people are saying, “I.” Pharaoh said it, Moses said it, and God said it. Moses was caught in three people speaking. This may be your situation also. It all depends in your life which “I” you listen to. The little “I” comes at you from three different directions. It comes to you from those who oppose you. It comes from your own fear and doubt. It comes from God. Who is the capital “I” in your life? That is the question Moses had to face. Likewise, who you listen to will determine your life. The answer is obvious. We should listen to God. Then who is the Lord that we should listen to?

Let’s take the first capital “I” Pharaoh. When Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Let my people go,” Pharaoh said in verse 2, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go.” We can see Satan through Pharaoh. Pharaoh had a strong grip on all Israelites. Likewise, Satan holds a strong grip on all sinful man and woman. Satan says, “I will not let this man go. I will not let this woman go.” Pharaoh thought that he was the great “I am.” He acknowledged no authority over God. He believed that his was the last word. Moses and Aaron could have given into fear before Pharaoh. But they delivered the message of judgment. Look at verse 3. “Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword.”

Whenever you seek to liberate someone from slavery, Satan through somebody always says, “I will not let this person go,” and make the situation worse. Look at verses 6-9. “That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and overseers in charge of the people: "You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies."” Bricks were made from clay. It was heavy and slow to dry. Clay mixed with straw made bricks quicker to dry and light to carry. Straw was provided by Pharaoh. But Pharaoh no longer decided to provide straw. Then the Israelites scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. When they ran out of stubble, every brick was solid clay. Can you imagine the weight and slowness of drying? They could not keep up the quota.

Pharaoh’s thinking was that the Israelites would have to work much harder and abandon their ideas about taking time to worship God. It worked. When the Israelites could not meet the quota, the Egyptian slave drivers beat the Israelite overseers mercilessly, saying “produce the same number of bricks as before!” The Israelite overseers appealed to Pharaoh. Look at verses 15-18. “Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: ‘Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, 'Make bricks!' Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.’ Pharaoh said, “Lazy, that’s what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks.”’” The Israelites came back to Moses and Aaron full of despair. It seemed that Moses and Aaron had only come to make their difficult lives in Egypt even more difficult. They didn’t blame Pharaoh. They blamed Moses for giving them a false hope in God’s redemption. They said, “Moses, you are messing with our situation. We were far better off before you tried to help us. Go away.”

The situation of the Israelites in Egypt is exactly the situation of all mankind under the power of sin, in a godless and materialistic world. In a godless and materialistic world, it seems that only our hard labor to eat three meals a day can save us. This labor and struggle must take first priority, no matter what. All other things are mere distractions from our main task to survive and be productive. And yet, no matter how hard we struggle, we don’t seem to get ahead. Rather, our labor beats us down and makes us numb to our spiritual life and spiritual desires. In a godless and materialistic world, we have no souls. Those who insist that there is more are viewed as trouble-makers. To go against the tide of godless materialism is to fight a losing battle, just as the Israelite overseers realized when they heard the Pharaoh’s message. They had rejoiced at hearing God’s message to them through Moses that God was concerned about them and would bring them into a new and spacious land, land flowing with milk and honey. But it seemed that they had to be content to remain as Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt forever, if they wanted to be able to survive. Likewise, it seems to most young people of today that in order to survive, we must play by the rules of godless materialism.

Now comes the second “I.” It is the capital “I” of Moses. When Moses heard the people’s complaint, he also despaired. Look at verses 22-23. “Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.” Moses says, “I am not the one. I cannot do it. I made the situation worse.” Moses tried to get out of his responsibility 3 times. In verse 6;12, Moses said, “If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?” He makes an excuse on his faltering speech.

Then comes the third capital “I.” Look at verse 6:1. “Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country."” The Lord heard Moses’ cry and plea. But the Lord was not shaken by the Pharaoh’s arrogance or pride. He knew that eventually, Pharaoh would drive the Israelites out of Egypt because of the wonders and signs he was going to perform. This was his promise to Moses. His labor to set the Israelites free from their slavery was not in vain. The Lord also reminded Moses of who he is, and of his covenant with his people. Look at verses 6:2-5. “God also said to Moses, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.”

God reminded Moses that he had revealed himself to Abraham as El-Shaddai or God Almighty, not as YHWH, the personal name of the covenant-keeping God. God is going to reveal himself in a new way, in a new power by delivering his people from slavery. The Lord had made a promise to his people through their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He was going to give them the land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey. He was going to relieve them of their suffering and bring them into the Promised Land. The God of Israel is a faithful God. He is faithful to his promises.

We learned last week that the name “I am who I am” means that our God is eternal, the One who exists by himself. It has another meaning. Namely, God is unique. You cannot describe him in any other way except by saying, “He is who he is.” You cannot give a name because it will limit him. We can only say, “He is who he is.” Another meaning is that God can be everything to everybody. “I am” usually have something after it. You can put anything you need after “I am.” God reveals himself as the great “I am” and leaves blank so that believers may supply anything they pray to after “I am.” If you say, “I need love,” you pray to “I am Love.” If you say, “I need strength,” you pray to “I am Strength.” “I need peace,” and you pray to “I am Peace.” It is as though you have a black cheque with “I am,” written on it, and you can fill in what you need. That is exactly what the Hebrews did. They took YHWH and added a Hebrew word after it. For example, Jehovah Jireh means, “I am your provider.” Jehovah Salom “I am Peace.” Jehovah Nissi “I am your Banner, or Victory.”

Most of all, God is the Redeemer. God had come to redeem the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, and to establish a new relationship with him as his chosen people. Look at verses 6-8. “"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.' "”

Notice seven “I will” in these verses. Notice also twenty-five “I” used by God in these verses, emphasizing what he had done, what he was doing, and what he would do. Here “redeem” appears for the first time in the Bible. “Redeem” means, “Let my people go.” Set them free to be God’s people. Let them be free so that they may serve God. God the Redeemer breaks the chain of slavery. God did not free us so that we may live miserable and meaningless lives. We are set free to follow God; Set free to serve God. Set free to love God. We are free to say “no” to sin and say “yes” to God every time.

The price of freedom for the Israelites was the destruction of Egypt including all the firstborn in Egypt. The Lord told Moses, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.” God established his covenant with his people as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Likewise we were slaves to sin. We have been suffering under the cruel master sin. It is not easy to escape the tyranny of sin. But God has come down to us through his Son, Jesus Christ, and redeemed us from the empty way of life handed down to us from our forefathers. The price of our freedom was the blood of the Son of God. Galatians 3:13-14 says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” Praise God that Christ redeemed us from the power of sin and set us free at the cost of his Son so that we may live as God’s holy children.

Look at verses 9. “Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage.” The people’s response to the Lord’s commitment to them was apathetic. What could the Lord do for them? They had no strength to imagine life free from slavery. They had no strength to just grab the Lord’s promises by faith and claim spiritual victory over the burdens of slavery. For this reason, God had raised up Moses to be their shepherd. He would be the one to represent the Lord and proclaim God’s word to Pharaoh and to the people. It would be by his faith in God’s promises that the people would be able to stand firm in their faith and finally be set free from their slavery in Egypt. Likewise, God calls us to be Jesus’ disciples so that we might proclaim freedom to all those who are still slaves of sin. As slaves, they are too weak to claim the promises of God all by themselves. We need to show them what faith in God’s promises can do in their lives as their shepherds.

Look at verses 10-11. “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country.” God again commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh, and says, “Let my people go.” Here was Moses’ dilemma. It is the dilemma we all face when God gave us a difficult task. There is the great “I” who opposes. There is “I” who says that I am unfit, and unable to do it. Then there is the great “I am” in heaven who says, “I am the Lord. I have made a promise and I am going to keep it.” Which I will govern your life? That is the dilemma Moses faced: Is it “I” of opposition? Is it “I” of fear, or is it “I” of Almighty God? Praise God that Moses decided to obey God. He said, “I am not going to listen to “I” of Pharaoh. I am not going to listen to “I” of Moses. I am going to listen to “I” of Almighty God.” Because of that, he was able to get his people out of slavery.

Whenever you decide to do God’s work, you will face many different “I.” Which one you choose to listen to will determine whether you can succeed in that mission.

Big Idea: Listen to God our Redeemer