

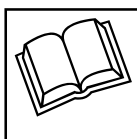
ing. Here we have Jesus in the role of healer showing openly the power of the Spirit and the incredible effects that it had on the recipient.

There is a specific reason for, and an important lesson in, the actions of Jesus in spitting to make clay prior to anointing the eyes of the blind man with it. No doubt Jesus could have healed the man just by words, but a deeper message was to be brought forward. It is one that will bring us to the focal point of our regular meeting for the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine. In spitting on the ground, we have presented before us in symbol something that came from the Lord's mouth, the Word of God. It was this that the Lord preached. The mixture was further made from the dust of the earth from which God made man. So here we are presented

with a remarkable picture to demonstrate to us God's love for all who put their trust in Him.

Jesus covers the eyes of the blind man with the clay and then tells him to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash. The route to Siloam was across the city and would undoubtedly have been somewhat precarious, so perhaps he needed help to get there. Once there, negotiating the steps would have been a worry to one who could see, let alone one who could not as yet. Siloam means 'sent', and it was here, following his confidence in and his obedience to the Master who sent him, that the blind man received his sight.

As we approach our oasis in the desert week by week, in order to remember him who died for us, we pray that in obeying the command given to us we shall be similarly blessed.



Exposition

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The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1-15

E. Moses and Pharaoh: first encounters—Exodus 5-6 (Part 2)

Mark Vincent

The format of the commentary

*The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.*

*Each major section is broken into **sub-sections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.*

Introduction

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER between Moses and Pharaoh had hardly been a success. Faced with Moses' request to let the Israelites go, the evil king had only added more to their burdens. With despair in their hearts, the Israelite officers now come to Pharaoh to plead with him to relent. When this fails they turn finally to Moses, crying out in desperation and blaming him for what has happened. What can Moses do but take their words to God, as he does at the end of the chapter? But it is not until chapter 6 that the response of God will be heard.

An appeal against Pharaoh's harshness

5:15 Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh, saying,

- Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants?
- 5:16 There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants are beaten; but the fault is in thine own people.
- 5:17 But he said, Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the LORD.
- 5:18 Go therefore now, and work;¹ for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver² the tale of bricks.
- 5:19 And the officers of the children of Israel did see that they were in evil case, after it was said, Ye shall not minish ought from your bricks of your daily task.

Comment

There are two features in this little section which are rather sad. Pharaoh has begun to turn up the heat for the Israelites, but their immediate reaction is to turn for help, not to God, but to Pharaoh: “[they] came and cried unto Pharaoh” (v. 15). In their desperation they turn in the very opposite direction to the one from which help might have come. They think they have more of a chance of remedying the situation by turning to Pharaoh than they do by turning to God. Only when Pharaoh refuses to budge, and all available options have been exhausted, do they turn to Moses—and then only in complaint. The exhortation can easily be brought home.

The second point concerns the way in which the officers of the Israelites identify themselves in the passage. No less than three times they refer to themselves, not as the servants of God, but as the servants of Pharaoh:

- “Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants?” (v. 15)
- “There is no straw given unto thy servants” (v. 16)
- “thy servants are beaten” (v. 16).

Of course, it could be argued that they had to refer to themselves in this way in Pharaoh’s presence or they would have been executed at once (just as we might be obliged to say, “Your Majesty”, in the presence of royalty, and just as Daniel said, “O king, live for ever”). But the threefold

repetition of the phrase “thy servants”, coupled with the play on the ideas of service and worship already seen in these chapters, makes it likely that a point is being made. It is all a question of how one sees oneself. The Israelite officers saw themselves primarily as Pharaoh’s servants, and perhaps in some vague secondary sense as servants of God. By their threefold self-identification as Pharaoh’s servants they implicitly state that for them Pharaoh’s lordship takes precedence over God’s.

But this will not do. We are servants of God before we are anything else, whether it be ‘company men’, members of various organisations or institutions, partakers of particular social functions and roles, or even members of the family into which God has placed us. Obligations and allegiance to Him must be paid and acknowledged before any other duty is discharged. Whatever happens in our lives, He must be our first port of call. He is the One with Whom we have to do and to Whom we must report.

For his part, Pharaoh has no interest in the officers’ plea (indeed, it is surprising he does not lay even more burdens upon them for daring to question him!). He blames their complaining on inherent laziness, and commands them to return to their burdens. Their “daily task” must not be diminished (note the stress on this daily work in verses 11,13,18,19, and the reminder of the curse upon Adam in Genesis 3:19). They were indeed “in evil case”, or, more literally, “in evil” (v. 19). It is a parallel ‘evil’ to the ones which take place under the sun, described in the book of Ecclesiastes: that men and women should toil and toil, day in and day out, for no ultimate purpose; that the fruits of their labours should be left to those who come after them, and who knows whether they will be wise or fools? So the Israelite forced labour gangs continued to make brick and erect public works for people they did not know, and build pyramids to be filled with the bones of dead Pharaohs.

All this is, of course, a parable. Even sin itself and the grave are not satisfied with all the souls that pass their way; no amount of service is ever enough until the final instalment is paid and the spirit returns to God Who gave it.

The people complain to Moses and Aaron

5:20 And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way,³ as they came forth from Pharaoh:

5:21 And they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred⁴ in the

eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us.

5:22 And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that Thou hast sent me?⁵

5:23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all.

Comment

Having brought their problem before Pharaoh to no avail, the officers now turn to Moses and Aaron, who are waiting to meet them as they return from Pharaoh's palace. Their complaint is perfectly understandable. They cannot conceive why, if God really does want to help and deliver them, He should make the situation worse before it gets better.

The officers' issue is with God, therefore, and yet they end up blaming Moses and Aaron. No one who has any sort of respect for God likes to blame Him, or to admit that they have difficulty in accepting the way in which He has acted. But it would be better to bring complaints against God out into the open and deal with them than to hide behind something else which is not the real issue, but which is more conveniently blamed. Moses and Aaron thus bear the brunt of the officers' criticism, which should have been voiced to God if it were to be voiced at all.

This mistake has been made many times in ecclesial life. It is all too easy to blame humans when really our problem is with something else, perhaps a weakness in our faith or a doubt about the way God is or is not working in our lives. If the problem is that we do not understand how God is working then we should take this to God rather than taking our frustration out on other humans. Human beings and their failings ought not to be used as a scapegoat when there are deeper issues to be addressed.

But, having identified that the real difficulty is God's allowing Pharaoh to increase the burdens with no matching benefit for the Israelites, is it right to take the matter to God? The answer is a definite 'yes'. We can see this, both from the fact that Moses does it in no uncertain terms and is not rebuked, and also from the many psalms and other prayers in the Scriptures which directly address such issues. On occasions this is done in a most direct and explicit way, as it is

here: "wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that Thou hast sent me?" (v. 22). Moses drives the point home with even more force in verse 23: "For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all". (The un-eloquent Moses seems to have no problem in making his point clear on this particular occasion!) For His part, God, far from being angry with the bluntness of Moses' complaint, responds by telling him that, though the evidence seems to point the other way, he will indeed see God's mighty deliverance.

With hindsight, something of why God chose to work in this way may be seen. He is drawing out and protracting the clash and rivalry between Himself and Pharaoh to teach a lesson which is central to the Old Testament: that man must wait God's time and learn to be totally dependent upon Him. "If God wants to deliver us", they ask, "why doesn't He just get on and do it?". So human, so natural! But events like this in Israel's history teach that we must be rather more patient and trusting of God's faithfulness when things do not work out quite how we might expect or wish. By all means let us go to God with our feelings, communicating with Him openly and honestly when we feel things are wrong; the Scriptures set many a precedent for doing so. But let us also remember the need for faithfulness, and that God has shown Himself to know best and to have the best interests of His people at heart.

God had to teach the utter contrast between the appalling slavery in Egypt and the marvelous redemption of the Exodus. Though they may not have appreciated the theology of the point at the time, the officers are brought to recognise this contrast with increasing clarity. The last phrase they use in verse 21 is instructive. They state that the upshot of the first encounter between Moses and Pharaoh is "to put a sword in [Pharaoh's] hand to slay us". Pharaoh had said nothing about a sword, and nothing about slaying them; the men simply had to do more work, and if they did not they would be beaten.

But the officers well knew where this was heading. The ultimate consequence of Pharaoh's new legislation would be death, whether through overwork and beating, or because Pharaoh was now set on a course in which legislation would be made stricter and stricter until keeping it became an impossibility and death became inevitable. This new Pharaoh is just like the old one in

chapter 1; he is a murderer. He is a man playing at God, wielding in his hand a sword of death to which he has no right.

1. **v. 18 Go therefore now, and work.** The word 'work' is literally 'serve' once more. See last month's [Comment](#) for the play on words taking place here. The phrase will come back to bite Pharaoh, for he will use the identical words with quite different meaning in 12:31, in which he finally encourages the Israelites to leave: 'go now therefore and serve/worship the Lord your God'! The death of the first-born sons has caused him to change his perspective completely on what Israel should go and do—yet the Hebrew language allows him to use the same word to describe it. Compare also 10:8,11,24.
2. **v. 18 given . . . deliver.** These two English words are translations of the same Hebrew term 'give'. Pharaoh refuses to give (in more ways than one), but the Israelites must continue to give (deliver) the required quantity of bricks, whatever suffering this may entail. Pharaoh is totally inflexible; it is the Israelites who must sacrifice.
3. **v. 20 who stood in the way.** Perhaps a *double entendre* here. Yes, Moses and Aaron were standing in the path as the officers returned from Pharaoh's palace. But this is also exactly what they had been doing metaphorically as far as the officers were concerned—getting in the way. The text thus aptly characterises the way in which the officers would have looked upon Moses and Aaron. If it had not been for them, the burdens would not have been increased and everything could have continued like it always had (and was not *that* marvellous!). Sometimes the feelings of familiarity, security and inevitability to be found in continued service are stronger than the yearnings for freedom; we do not always want to be saved as much as we should.
4. **v. 21 our savour [is] abhorred.** This phrase translates one Hebrew word: 'You have made us *stink* in the eyes of Pharaoh' (some have suggested it means, 'caused our breath to stink', but a wider meaning seems more likely). It is, of course, an idiom for saying that Moses has made Pharaoh hate them even more than he did before, and in older English the word 'odious' was used in a similar way. There is an interesting play on this word later in the story, in the narrative of the plagues. The Israelites had offended Pharaoh, they had been odious to him—yet later on he would receive a literal stink because of them. Exactly the same word is used twice in the plague narratives to describe the stench that filled the land of Egypt as the fish and frogs decayed in their turn (plagues 1 and 2: 7:21; 8:14). Pharaoh may have found the behaviour and complaints of the Israelites to be foul, but God would give him a far greater and more literal stench to cope with.
5. **v. 22 why is it that Thou hast sent me?** Moses' frustration comes out here, as he directs God back to his calling in the previous two chapters. Moses had been right all along—he obviously was the wrong man for the job, just as he had said! If only God had listened to him then all this could have been avoided!

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