



1-2-1 with God - Overcoming Opposition - Ex.5:15-6:9
Sunday 21st January 2018

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Exodus 5:19 - 6:9 - ¹⁵ Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: "Why have you treated your servants this way? ¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ Pharaoh said, "Lazy, that's what you are-lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' ¹⁸ Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks." ¹⁹ The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, "You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day." ²⁰ When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, ²¹ and they said, "May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us." ²² Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? ²³ 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."

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." ² God also said to Moses, "I am the LORD. ³ 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. ⁴ I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. ⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.' " ⁹ Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage.

I wonder whether you saw this picture in the newspapers this week:



You can imagine the headlines but clearly the poor man from Specsavers was having a bad day.
Or what about the Halfords lorry last year that didn't quite fit as hoped!



Or my personal favourite: 'Safe removals' - not quite so safe!



We all have bad days sometimes. Just last week Mims had just spent over an hour cleaning a cooker for someone who needed a bit of a help at home, only for the door glass to smash as she was finally closing it. My son Ethan was taking his girlfriend out to the Hippodrome in Bristol on Monday only to discover that he had not only left his wallet at home, but he had also left her beautifully wrapped presents in a bag on the train that just departed for London. We have a family expression for it – ‘non ma dia’ which sounds like ‘not my day’ but is actually Italian for ‘does not give’. Sometimes we just want to cry out ‘give me a break!’

Now of course all these incidents were annoying, but thankfully they were not life threatening. Many of you will have experienced bad days where life becomes truly overwhelming, where your friends or family suddenly face a nightmare and everything seems so cruel and unfair.

How do you cope? What should we do when a bomb has gone off and everything suddenly seems so disorientating and discouraging? My friend Dave Keeper went out to Uganda to serve the Lord in the slums of Kampala last year only to suffer a detached retina and the loss of sight in one of his eyes. So within a few weeks of arriving, he can’t drive, reading is difficult and the cost of treatment is huge. How should he respond?

For those of you who have been following Freddy Vallender’s fight for life, his huge heart operation is happening tomorrow and we’re praying that he will make a full recovery. But what a trauma for a family to be going through! How can they cope when each day is such a test of faith and fortitude?

Well Moses experienced a severely traumatic time as soon as he returned to Egypt to begin his ministry. He had to learn quickly how to deal with discouragement and opposition and I know the lessons he learnt are still relevant for us today some 3500 years later. We are continuing our series *1-2-1 with God* and we come to the point in the story of Exodus where Moses has been obedient to the call of God. He’s gone and told Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, only for things to go from bad to worse. Instead of a victorious march to freedom, the oppression just gets worse. The Israelites are forced to work harder, gathering their own straw to make bricks and reach their quotas or face the cruel discipline of the Egyptian slave-drivers.

Mud bricks made with straw, known as Adobe bricks are still used for construction today.



In fact in some countries they are starting to be used in preference to brick and concrete because of their good thermal properties and low environmental impact. But it is back-breaking work to make lots of them by hand and the Israelite foremen were naturally exasperated by having to find their own straw. They take it out on Moses and Aaron in v21:

"May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

So Moses knew what it's like as a leader to have a really bad day. He is not only dealing with the true enemy Pharaoh, but now his own people are judging him too. This isn't quite the joyous ministry in the Kingdom he was hoping for!

Yet his response is a model for us this morning. Moses had an absolutely critical choice to make and it is a choice that each of us faces every time we encounter any discouragement or enemy oppression. In fact I would say it is one of the primary choices that determines whether we can go deeper in faith and assurance or actually start to distance ourselves from discipleship.

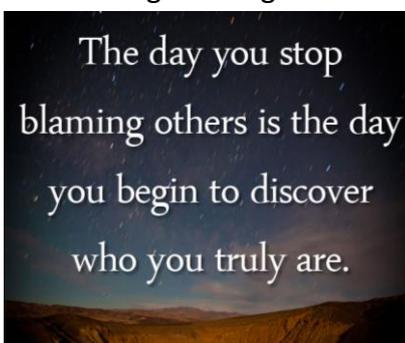
Moses could have lashed out and blamed others for the situation:

'Aaron, you must have aggravated Pharaoh!'

'You workers, why are you wingeing about a bit of straw!'

'You Israelites, why did you let yourselves get enslaved in the first place?'

But blaming others gets us nowhere. As Jeremy Binns wrote:



But what did Moses say to them? Nothing. He sucked it up and took it on the chin. And what he actually does in verse 22 gives us the true response of a great leader and a true God-follower:

Moses returned to the Lord

God would rather you dump your outrage on him than blame others or fester in silent anger. Moses chose the former.

Verse 22:

"O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? ²³ 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."

That is an OK prayer. It's real. It's honest. It's relationship and God can handle it. He didn't smite Moses down for his anguished prayer.

One of my favourite films is Forest Gump. In it there's a scene where Lieutenant Dan is with Forest on a clapped out Shrimp boat. His frustration at life and being left paraplegic is boiling over to the point where he says 'Where the hell's this God of yours?' At which point suddenly 'God shows up' and they're caught in a monstrous storm. Then follows this captivating scene where Lieutenant Dan shouts and swears and vents all his anger at the God of the storm.



Somehow they survive, only to discover that theirs is the only remaining shrimp boat in the area. Life changes for Lieutenant Dan and somehow in the end, Forest concludes 'he made peace with God.' Perhaps an angry prayer is better than no prayer at all.

God can handle our emotions. He could handle Moses' frustrations. He can handle our complaint and confusions. What he wants is conversation.

The Lord responds to Moses in verse 1 of chapter 6 and assures him that he will see justice for the Israelites. But more than that, in the next 7 verses something remarkable takes place. Three times, in verse 2, 6 and 8 God says to Moses 'I am the LORD.' Now the translation isn't brilliant here because actually the Hebrew says I am **יהוה** / *I am Yahweh*. To say 'I am the LORD' is a bit like Mims saying to me 'I am the wife', when actually so much more is conveyed by her saying 'I'm Mims'. Yahweh means 'I am that I am' or 'I was, I am and I will be.' It is his personal name – **יהוה**]

In some translations like the King James it says 'I am Jehovah'. Jehovah was a 13th century translation of **יהוה** (known as the Tetragrammaton or YHWH) because early Jews felt that the name Yahweh was too holy to be spoken and they inserted the vowels from another name for God 'Adonai' into the Latin Letters YHWH, which comes out in Latin scripts of the Bible as Yehovah. But the general consensus is that Yahweh is closer to the actual original pronunciation.

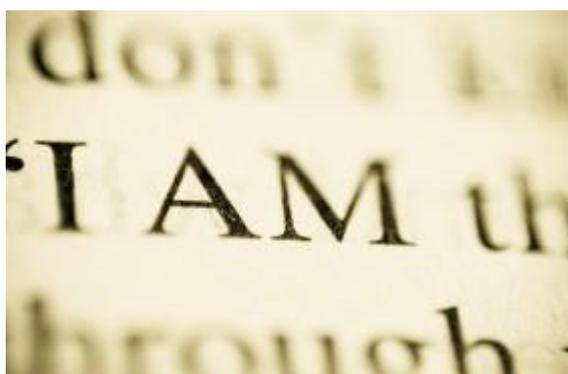
Neil Snyder wrote a book called 'His name is Yahweh' lamenting the fact that we have lost a lot of meaning in our current translations of the names of God.

Titles and Names for God
Used Frequently in the Bible:

1. God—Elohim
2. Lord—Adonai
3. "the LORD"—Yahweh: God's Personal Name, HASHEM, the Divine Name
4. "the Lord GOD"—Adonai Yahweh
5. LORD of hosts—Yahweh Sabaoth

Three times the Lord says to Moses 'I am Yahweh'. By using his personal name, He is saying 'look, you know me! I will not let you down. You know my name.'

In Acts 4 after Peter had healed a crippled beggar he was asked "by what power or by what name did you do this?" and he was filled with the Holy Spirit and replied: 'know this, you and all the people of Israel: it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.' The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew Yeshua which means 'Yahweh saves', and in John's Gospel we find the seven 'I am' statements of Jesus – eg I am the Light of the world. I am the gate. I am the good shepherd.



He also said 'Before Abraham was, I am!' at which point the religious leaders picked up stones to kill him because of his apparent blasphemy. At the great commission Jesus said to his disciples 'Behold, I am with you to the very end of the age' So just as Yahweh promised to be with Moses and to bring the people out of oppression and into freedom, Jesus promises to be with us until the very end of the age. Until he returns to bring peace, justice and righteousness to every unjust and unresolved situation.

We know with the benefit of hindsight that of course in the end the people were delivered and brought out of slavery into the promised land. It is a picture of our redemption and sanctification. But for Moses, freedom took a lot longer than he would have wanted, and our experience, like his, is that things may get worse before it gets better. Often the darkest hour is just before the dawn. We have to trust him even in the darkest hour. Three times God repeats his commitment to Moses through declaring his name and the essence of his character. *I am with you.*

Moses had a bad day. You and I have bad days and will do in the future, but *whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*

Jesus has promised it.

So come, let's return to the Lord and keep calling on his name.