

GOD SAYS, "LET MY PEOPLE GO" (3)

Exodus 5:1-10:29

Key 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.'"

In the last passage we learned that Moses received 40 years of education in the Egyptian palace. This partially nurtured him as an eminent person, but it was not enough to enable him to lead 600,000 people who were like slaves. To God, Moses needed humbleness training in order to be a future leader of 600,000 Israelites. So God sent him to the desert where Jethro, a priest, lived. God made him a shepherd for Jethro's flock for 40 years to make him a most humble man. Then God called him to deliver his people from Egypt. When God commissioned Moses to deliver his people out of Egypt, at first, Moses was hesitant, for he was not ready to shepherd his people. Anyway he obeyed God and went to Egypt. In today's passage, we learn that Moses could grow in faith in God by confronting King Pharaoh the Terrible. On the other hand, King Pharaoh perished because of his disobedience. This lecture teaches us the heart of God who said, Let my people go.

I. God sends Moses to Pharaoh (5:1-21)

First, Moses obeys God's command (5:1). Despite 80 years of training, Moses was not ready to lead the Exodus, partly because he had lived a hermit life for a long time, but mainly because of his inner fear. Nevertheless, God sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh to say, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'" Moses' demand, "Let my people go," was ridiculous to a despotic King Pharaoh, leader of the world power nation of the time. Still, this was the starting point of the Exodus.

As history proves, obtaining freedom in any country has never been an easy matter. For example, it took the people of the United Kingdom 1,000 years to obtain freedom from the monarchy system. America is the land of freedom, but our freedom did not come naturally. We had to engage in the Revolutionary War and later the Civil War and lost innumerable lives. Russia imported communism from Germany to obtain freedom from the Czar's despotic rule. For this they bled the lives of 20 million people. But instead of freedom and equality, communism confined people behind the Iron Curtain for 70 years, where there was no freedom at all.

God wanted to liberate the Israelites because they wanted

liberation, but it was not an easy task. Moses knew how terrible King Pharaoh was. Moses knew how mighty the Egyptian army was. Moses knew how weak he was. Moses knew how rebellious his people were: They moved as much as they were whipped. But after much training, Moses went and confronted Pharaoh. The confrontation was like a contest between a sheepdog and a powerful lion, or a sparrow and an eagle. Nevertheless, Moses went and confronted King Pharaoh and delivered God's message: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert'" (5:1).

Second, Pharaoh denies God's existence intentionally (5:2-21). What was Pharaoh's response? He said, "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" (2). According to archaeology, the Egyptians had innumerable idols; each family had a different god, and a different idol. Pharaoh must have been an idol worshiper. But he had an inborn knowledge of God, for men are made in the image of God (Ge 1:27). Despite this, Pharaoh did not want to accept the Creator God. When he said, "Who is the LORD?" he was suppressing the truth of God and he disobeyed God's command (Ro 1:18).

Sitting on a throne arrogantly, the king turned down Moses' claim. At this moment, Moses' and Aaron's destiny seemed to be determined by Pharaoh's finger motion. But they delivered God's message fearlessly to Pharaoh. 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.'" It is a matter of life and death for God's people to worship God.

King Pharaoh became violent out of his arrogance. Pharaoh protested, "Why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work! Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working" (4-5). Pharaoh said this as if he worried about the Israelite slaves' job problem or security problem. But in reality, he was worrying about labor power, which is essential to a nation.

In rebellion against God, Pharaoh made a policy of hard labor for the Israelites (6-9). He gave his slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people orders not to supply straw for making bricks. And he strongly charged that the Israelites not reduce the daily quota of bricks. Pharaoh's imposition was beyond human reach. And Pharaoh oppressed them by saying, "You are lazy" (17). According to King Pharaoh's order, the slave drivers and foremen drove the Israelites to produce the same amount of bricks without giving them straw. In order to do so, the slave drivers kept whipping them mercilessly, saying, "Complete the work. Complete the work" (13).

Israelite foremen were appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers. They became scapegoats. The Egyptian slave drivers beat up the foremen badly so as to oppress the other Israelites all the more (14). The Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh that straw be given to them (16). Pharaoh said, "Lazy, that's what you are--lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD'" (17). Pharaoh said, "No straw will be given to you." Pharaoh was as cruel as could be.

The Israelite foremen, after hearing King Pharaoh, found Moses and Aaron and complained: "You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us" (21). The Israelites were miserable because they were driven by the Egyptian slave drivers. They were miserable because they were underfed and overworked, and were beaten up every day. However, the root cause of their misery was that they did not know that God was with them and that God had hope for them. They did not know that God sent Moses and Aaron to liberate them from slavery. They did not know that they were paying the cost of freedom. There is no freedom without a high cost. Freedom is the most precious thing for all human beings. But it is the most expensive thing. Those who think that sinning is freedom are no less than mental patients.

II. Pharaoh's tragic disobedience (5:22-10:29)

First, Moses prays (5:22-23). God sent Moses to deliver his people. But the situation got worse. Neither King Pharaoh nor the Israelites listened to Moses. Moses was utterly helpless. It seemed that Moses' mission had failed. He had no place to go for help. But he did have one place. Moses went to God. What did he do when he went to God? Moses prayed, "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" (22-23). Moses was very sympathetic with his suffering people. Moses was bitter that God didn't liberate his people all at once. Moses did not know how expensive the price of freedom is. He also did not know God's long-term plan of world salvation work, and that they were paying the price for it. To God, it was merely the beginning of deliverance. But to Moses, it looked as if they were at the end of their rope.

Second, God sent Moses to tell his people of God's deliverance (6:1-7:13). Moses needed some rest. And God knew that his people the Israelites were undergoing unbearable suffering and oppression because of bricks without straw. But God was not sentimental. God never retreated from what he was doing. Read 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.

God also told them, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty...I will bring you to the (promised) land..." (2,3,8). The meaning of these verses is that our God is the God who makes covenants. Our God keeps his promises. As God promised to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, God would send his people to the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey (2-5). At the present, his people were suffering unbearably when God began his work of deliverance. But God Almighty would surely deliver them and send them to the promised land. Our God is a great God. Our God is the God of hope. Our God is Almighty God who controlled the destiny of the world power nation, Egypt. Therefore, there is no despair in God. We should not despair at the present hardship; rather, we must rejoice in the hope of God (Ro 5:2).

God confirmed his covenant in verses 6-8 by saying, "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.'" Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen because of their discouragement and cruel bondage (9). Here we learn that the time of hardship is the time to listen to God's word. Listening to God's word requires all our heart, all our soul and all our strength (Dt 6:5).

After delivering God's message to the people, Moses was greatly discouraged because of his people's despair. Then God visited Moses. But God did not comfort him in his grief over his people. Rather God chastised him by saying, "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country" (11). Here we learn that our God is the greatest leader, who knows no defeat, but only victory. The leaders of God's church must learn leadership from God. Leaders should be victorious like God. Our God decided to deliver his people, and he never grew tired in the midst of harrowing circumstances.

What was Moses' response to God's sending him again? He said, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?" (2) In doing something, discouragement always follows, as a tree is followed by a shadow. But leaders must not depend on their faltering lips, as Moses did. When confronted with impossible situations, leaders must depend on God as a matter of life and death. (Verses 13-25 are the family record of Moses and Aaron. Why is this genealogy suddenly inserted here? It is to

verify that Exodus has historicity.)

God never gives up on the way. God again visited Aaron and Moses and commanded them, "Bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions" (26). The LORD spoke to Moses in Egypt. He said to him, "I am the LORD. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you." But Moses said to the LORD, "Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?" (28-30) Moses was in a state of despair. Still, Moses did not know how to depend on God; he was only thinking about his faltering lips. Moses had faith in God. But he needed wisdom to know how to practice it.

Did God look with pity upon Moses' suffering, which came from his unsure faith and heavy cross? No. Not at all. Look at 7:1a. "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh....'" God did not look at Moses with pity. Instead, God gave Moses God's power and authority over Pharaoh. God put King Pharaoh in Moses' hand so that King Pharaoh might listen to his servant Moses. God also gave him Aaron, Moses' older brother, as his spokesman. All Moses had to do was obey God's word and act according to his command. We can understand Moses very well. It's easy for us to listen to God's word. But it's not easy for us to practice his word. Moses was in a situation in which he had to put what he learned into practice. God also said, "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it" (3-5). God said, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." It does not necessarily mean that God hardened Pharaoh's heart literally. It means that Pharaoh hardened his own heart because he did not repent, but willfully rejected God's word. Someone said, "I hardened my heart." The same person said, "You don't know how much I have been tormented." He did not know why he was tormented, but he has been tormented by his hardened heart.

The LORD, the holy God, said to Moses and Aaron, "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a miracle,' then say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a snake" (8-9). According to God's command, Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh once more. When Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh, it became a snake as God had said (10). Pharaoh's magicians did the same. At the moment a mysterious thing happened: Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs (11-12). Through this event God demonstrated his mighty power, and he showed that Pharaoh's magicians were no more than magic artists. Pharaoh saw with his own eyes that God Almighty made Aaron's staff swallow their staffs. But Pharaoh did not surrender. Instead, he hardened his heart and became worse (13).

Third, the first nine plagues (7:14-10:29). When we study the first part carefully, we see that God intended to negotiate with Pharaoh. But Pharaoh hardened his heart. In other words, Pharaoh decided not to listen to God. He saw God Almighty working when Aaron's staff swallowed his magicians' staffs. But he suppressed the truth and acted as if nothing had happened. God knew that Pharaoh could not be healed by God's grace, but needed God's judgment. So God decided to judge him with ten plagues. Hardening our hearts only invites God's judgment.

The first plague was the plague of blood. God commanded Moses, "Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the water. Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. Then say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert'" (14-16). As God commanded, Moses went and warned Pharaoh, "I will strike the water of the Nile, it will be changed into blood and the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water" (17-18). But Pharaoh did not respond. So Moses raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. Blood was everywhere (19-21). But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts and pleased Pharaoh. The Nile River was the origin of Egyptian civilization, and it was the life-line of the Egyptian people, for they drank from it. Now the water of the Nile River became blood, and the Egyptians were in a sad plight with no water. But Pharaoh did not care about his people. He became more arrogant, stubborn and unrepentant before the holy God.

The second plague was the plague of frogs (7:25-8:15). The Egyptian Empire became the empire of frogs. Frogs emanated an offensive odor. Their chorus was noisy, to the degree that no one could endure. Pharaoh must have had a grinding headache because of the never-ending frogs' chorus. But he hardened his heart.

The third plague was the plague of gnats (8:16-19). The dust of the ground became gnats. In other words, lifeless substance became living beings and began to bore in the Egyptians. All the Egyptians had to bear the gnats boring in. Pharaoh commanded his magicians to produce gnats, but they could not, because human magic arts have great limitations. So the magicians said, "This is the finger of God." At this point the Egyptian magicians surrendered to God and had the fear of God. But Pharaoh hardened his heart (19).

The fourth plague was the plague of flies (8:20-32). Flies covered the Egyptian Empire (24). Pharaoh was king of the Egyptian Empire. But flies were buzzing all around the palace as if they were ordering King Pharaoh to do something. The flies made everything dirty. Moreover,

they did not recognize the dignity and power of King Pharaoh. They sat on the throne, and Pharaoh was standing. Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land. And pray for me" (28). Then Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. The LORD did what Moses asked. The flies left Pharaoh, his officials and his people. But this time also, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let God's people go (30-31). Psalm 15:4 says that a godly man is one who "despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts." Pharaoh did not keep his promise. He was a liar. Someone said, "Politicians are first-class liars. Second are journalists, third are lawyers." Pharaoh was a liar (Jn 8:44).

The fifth plague was the plague on livestock (9:1-7). Read 9:1. Then the Lord said to Moses, Go to Pharaoh and say to him, This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. But Pharaoh did not listen to them. The next morning all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but no animal belonging to the Israelites died. Pharaoh found that God destroyed all the livestock of the Egyptians but spared all the livestock of the Israelites (7). See! But Pharaoh did not obey God's word. Here we learn that hardening one's heart is a willful demonstration of disobedience. Here God clearly showed Pharaoh that he protects his people. God protects his people, not because they are good, but because they are people of the covenant, which was made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God protected his people, not because they are good, but because God had a plan to raise them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But Pharaoh hardened his heart, thinking that hardening his heart was everything.

The sixth plague was the plague of boils (9:8-12). The more Pharaoh hardened his heart, the more heavy God's punishment became. The boils were festering sores, breaking out on men and animals throughout the land. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils. All Pharaoh's people were perishing because of boils. But Pharaoh did not care about his people. He was only feeding his pride. The seventh and eighth plagues of hail and locusts devastated the land of Egypt. The nation was at the brink of utter destruction. The ninth plague of darkness was an ominous foreboding. Here we learn that Pharaoh was Satan and the power of sin. Satan never yields to let God's people go. Satan is like a roaring lion who wants to devour the children of God (1 Pe 5:8). Proverbs 12:1 says, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid." Pharaoh was a foolish man because he did not listen to God, but to Satan's lying. No one can stop the Sovereign God from carrying out his redemptive purpose.

There is no medicine to heal the power of sin. Men are unhappy, not because of human conditions, but because of the power of sin in their hearts. Many call America a "melting pot," not because it is too hot,

but because the power of sin, especially the sin of an easygoing mentality and immorality, which melts everything. But God's mighty hand delivers us from the power of sin.

In this passage we learn that Moses was a man of obedience. He did not give up. In order to obey God, he risked his life many times. Thus he became the deliverer of his people. On the other hand, Pharaoh was a man of disobedience who brought disaster upon himself as well as his people. Most importantly, we learn that God is Almighty God who fulfills his plan for world salvation, and makes his slave people a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.