Let My People Go (1)

(I am the Lord God Almighty)

Exodus 5:1-6:27

Key Verse: 5:1 “Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “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 wilderness.”

Last week we learned that God called Moses. God called Moses when he was in the wilderness, not in the palace. When God called Moses, Moses refused to accept God’s mission because he thought that he was not qualified. While living in the wilderness as shepherd, he became ineloquent and flattering. He thought that he was too old to carry out God’s mission. Despite Moses’ excuse about his poor human condition, God’s calling was not revoked. God promised Moses to be with him. God encouraged Moses to depend on God, not on himself. God’s work can be done by God through his chosen people. God’s work cannot be confined by human condition or person’s ability, but by God’s will. What those who are called by God should do is to trust in God and obey Him.

In 4:18-31 the Lord appeared to Moses, who was in Midian and told him to go to Pharaoh to deliver his message about freedom for the Israelites. On the way the Lord was about to kill Moses because Moses did not fully commit to God’s mission. His wife Zipporah circumcised Moses’ son quickly so that they might fulfill God’s covenant which was made with his father Abraham. Circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant with his people. (Ge 17:7,11) God circumcised the heart of Moses before he carried out God’s mission in Egypt.

In today’s passage Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh with God’s message. God’s message to Pharaoh was ‘Let my people go so that they may worship me.” (4:23, 5:1) Today we will study the meaning of God’s message, his divine character, and Pharaoh’s response to God’s message.

First, let my people go (5:1-23) Look at verse 1. “***Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “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 wilderness***.” According to 4:29-31 before Moses went to Pharaoh, he and Aaron met the elders of Israel and delivered God’s message, and they performed signs before them as assurance of God’s message. All the elders of Israel believed Moses and bowed down before the LORD and worshiped him. Now, Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh with God’s message. God’s message was the liberation of Israel and their freedom for worship: *Let me people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.*” The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for 430 years. During this period God multiplied their number enough to become a nation. Now the time has come for them to return to their homeland: Canaan, which was the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey. In the Promised Land they could worship the Lord their God freely without any disturbance from the Egyptians.

God’s message, “Let my people go and worship me” is the same message of salvation for prisoners of sin. The prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 61:1, “*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners*,…” Jesus said, “*Now everyone who sins is a slave to sin.* (Jn 8:34) Those who sin become slave to sin and walk in darkness. As Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, which is the devil. Our battle is a spiritual battle against Satan, not against people. Man is both body and soul. So, man cannot be judged by their outward appearance or visible phenomena. There are many people who look happy and attractive outwardly, but suffer much inwardly and sick mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Many of them suffer from oppression, suppression, compulsion and addiction. They need freedom. They need release from the power of darkness which makes their lives miserable. Satan is like the arrogant Pharaoh and cruel Egyptian slave drivers who forced hard labor on the Israelites. The problem was that the Israelites had no power to save themselves. They had no way out for freedom because they were slaves. They needed a savior who could deliver them out of Egypt. They needed someone who was stronger than Pharaoh. Now the time has come for their freedom. Now the day of salvation was proclaimed by the deliverer. God sent Moses as the deliverer for the Israelites. In the same way God sent Jesus as the deliverer for our freedom. Jesus said, “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*.” (Jn 8:36) As God sent Moses to deliver his people out of Egypt, now God sent Jesus Christ to deliver us from the slavery of sin and Satan so that we may worship the Lord and serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness. (Lk 1:74,75) God’s message: “Let my people go so that they may worship me” is the same message “Let my sons and daughters go so that they may worship the Lord freely.” “Let my children go so that they may serve the Lord whole-heartedly”.

What was Pharaoh’s response to God’s message? Look at verse 2. “***Pharaoh 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***.” Pharaoh neglected God’s message. He refused Moses’ request. He rejected God’s message because he did not know who the God of Israel was. Pharaoh thought that the God of Israel was the God of powerless slaves. He did not know God’s plan related to the covenant with Abraham behind his message. Ignorance is the root of unbelief and arrogance. Later after receiving the ten plagues, Pharaoh knew who the God of Israel was. After all his first born sons in Egypt were killed, Pharaoh confessed that God is the Lord. People are proud and become rebellious against God mainly because they do not know who God is. When they know who God really is, they may believe. When they know Him, they love Him and obey Him. Some may come to know Him through Bible studies. Others may know Him through revelations and miracles. Still, others may know Him after hitting the bottom or experiencing much suffering like Pharaoh. This is the reason why we have to preach the word and teach the Bible to those who are ignorant of God. Jesus said in John 8:31,32, “*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*.”

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 wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword***.” Moses and Aaron repeated God’s message plus his warning of punishment against Pharaoh’s rebellion. The choice was given to Pharaoh between life and death. What was Pharaoh’s response to God’s message? In verses 3,4 Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron that they were just taking the people away from their labor. He thought that they just came to stop them from working. Pharaoh did not take God’s word seriously. He was like Satan who tempted men in the Garden so that they might not take God’s word seriously and eat the forbidden fruit. What did Pharaoh do next? In verses 6-9 Pharaoh ordered the Israelites to make the same numbers of bricks without providing straws. In the past straws were provided to the Israelites for making bricks, but now the slaves had to find straws by themselves and meet the same amount of bricks like before. Pharaoh wanted to crush their spirit for freedom with harder labor. The slave drivers kept pressing them saying, “***Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw.***” (13) The slave drivers even beat the Israelites overseers, who appealed to Pharaoh: ***Why have you treated your servants this way?...”*** (15) Pharaoh answered them in verses 17,18. “***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***.” Later when the Israelites overseers came to realize that this trouble came from Moses who delivered God’s message, they said to Moses, “***May the LORD look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.***”(21) Similar to this case, we often experience that even though we obey God’s word and follow his direction things would not seem to get better, but worse. We expect that all things may go well when we live by faith, study the Bible, attend church service regularly, have morning devotion, participate in Christian activities, and so on. We expect our relationship with others get better, our grades get better, our business become successful, our health improve and so on. But, we sometimes experience the opposite. Moses expected Pharaoh to listen to him and let his people go so that he could receive honor and praise from them. But on the contrary Pharaoh did not listen to him and the people’s working situation got worse than before. Moses was about to be stoned to death by his people.

Look at verses 22-23. “***Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.***” Moses complained to God about all things, God’s calling, Pharaoh’s rejection, and harsh work on his people. He said that God brought trouble on them. He forgot God who had foretold Pharaoh’s stubborn refusal and God’s punishment (4:21-23) God said to Moses when he was still in the wilderness that Pharaoh wound not listen to him and not let the Israelites go until God punished the Egyptians. Therefore, real problem was not Pharaoh’s rejection or harsh labor on the Israelites, but Moses’ unbelief. People say that unbelief is disaster. What should we do when things do not go as we expect? What if things seem to get worse even though we pray more? What if we are in trouble despite our obedience? How did Peter answer this? He said in 1 Peter 4:12-13, which says, “*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed*.” Pharaoh’s rejection was not a strange thing. Harsh labor on his people was not a strange thing, either. They were God’s divine discipline for his people to make them a great nation according to his wisdom and foreknowledge. We often don’t understand our sufferings. We don’t accept the reality which seems to go against us. But when we see all things from God’s viewpoint, there should be God’s divine plan and purpose to make all things good for us . Sometimes our faith is tested through sufferings. Sometimes our faith becomes stronger through hardships and trials. Through God’s divine disciplines the Israelites who used to be slaves became a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Hebrews 12:7-11 says, “*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children…No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it*.” God answers our prayer. Our prayer is not denied, but delayed. Galatians 6:9 says. “*Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.* (NASB) Amen!

Second, they will know that I am the Lord (6:1-27) How did God answer Moses? Look at verse 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 repeated the word “*because of my mighty hand*”. Here the word “hand” (*yad*) means ‘power’ or ‘sign.’ God will deliver his people by his mighty power. Moses needed to be still and see what God was going to do. God continued. Look at verses 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 fully known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.***” God said to Moses “I am the LORD”. God said that he is the LORD--- Yahweh (Jehovah). In these verses God revealed who the LORD God really is. The LORD is God Almighty---*El-Shaddai*. He is the Creator of the whole universe. He is the Sovereign Lord who rules world history and determines person’s destiny. He is the author of life. Our lives belong to Him because our lives came from Him and are going back to Him. Secondly, our God is the faithful God. He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, which means that he is the faithful God who keeps his promise. He remembered the covenant with them and kept his promises with them. We are unfaithful, but God is faithful. Our unfaithfulness cannot nullify God’s faithfulness. God’s faithfulness accomplishes his goal. Thirdly, our God is the compassionate God. Our God was concerned about the sufferings of the Israelites. He heard their outcries under the yoke of Pharaoh and had compassion on them. God does not neglect the sufferings of his children. God cares, answers, and saves his suffering children.

In verses 6-8 God repeated the words, “*I will*” seven times. Look at verses 6-8. This means that not Moses, but God himself will deliver his people out of Egypt. The work of God is accomplished by God himself, not by human ability and willpower. How could Moses deliver one million people out of Egypt? He could not even move Pharaoh’s heart. At their first encounter Pharaoh rejected Moses’ message and gave him harder time. At the first round Moses was knocked out by Pharaoh. So what Moses had to do was to depend on God’s mighty hand. The LORD God himself will do it. Trust and obey! When we go for fishing on campus, we need such faith which pleases God. Instead of calculating this and that, we simply trust in God and invite students by faith. “Let my people go and worship me.” “Let my sheep come to church and worship God.” “Let my children be freed from the hand of Satan.” Our God is Almighty God. He is with us in our mission and helps us to know what to say and how to answer through the Holy Spirit. Kit and our missionaries meet on Saturday afternoon to discuss about the effective and fruitful outreach on campus. Please pray for us to have a wonderful strategy and wisdom for the fruitful outreach. Above all, pray for us to believe in God’s promise and depend on the power of the Holy Spirit as witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Acts 4 Peter and John preached Jesus Christ before the crowd. Their message was powerful that 5,000 were converted that day by Peter’s message. The religious leaders seized Peter and John and put them in jail in order to stop them. But God’s word was not chained. Before the Sanhedrin they proclaimed the name of Jesus and preached the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection more boldly. The authority of the religious leaders could not stop them. The power of Satan could not stop them from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. This was the prayer of the believers, “*Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus*.” (Ac 4:29,30) May the prayer of the saints be our prayer, too! Amen.