

# ***Shaping A Nation - When It Only Seems To Get Worse***

**Exodus 5:1 - 6:13**

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Read Exodus 5:1 - 6:13

It must have seemed like an impossible mission for Moses, right from the very beginning. Who of us, after all, would respond enthusiastically if God called us, say, to march in Beijing and demand autonomy for the people of Tibet? Or, perhaps, into North Korea and demand that the leadership stop its foolish tinkering with nuclear arms and use the money to feed the starving masses, instead. Those are about as equivalent assignments as I could imagine to the one that the Lord gave to Moses - go to Pharaoh and say, "Let my people go..."

If you were with us last week, you'd have been part of our meditation about the objections that Moses raised. We talked not only about his objections, but also ours - objections that we raise to ministry opportunities that the Lord puts in our path.

We realized then that it's better to commit than to object.

That was then.

Today's reading has to make you wonder, though.

Chapter four describes God virtually shoving Moses down the road towards Egypt. He had no choice but to go.

Never mind the objections.

Never mind Moses' inadequacies.

Never mind how enormous the task seemed.

"Moses - **GO!**"

And he went.

On to victory and freedom, right?

Hah - you really have to wonder after today's reading.

Now here's the hard part when you read Exodus 5 & 6. You really want to try and read it as if you didn't know what would be coming next. As if chapter 7 had not yet been written. Which is hard for anyone who knows the story of Israel, who knows about Passover and the Red Sea and all the rest.

Try and wipe that stuff off your mental hard drive for now, though.

Try and put yourself in Moses' place.

God gives you no alternative but to go. You, in obedience, go. And find yourself stumbling from one disaster to another. Things seem to only go from bad to worse. There isn't a single redeeming moment, not one ray of sunshine, in the entire passage. It's all bad news - not even bad news with a silver lining; bad news told in a good way so that it doesn't sound so bad.

Just plain bad news.

You know it's not quite going as you hoped when the king stares back at you from the throne and says, "God Who?"

And then he gets angry.

And then, rather than just giving Moses the boot, he issues an order that makes their suffering much more intense.

Moses goes back to headquarters, so to speak, and - rather than being allowed to quit - v.13 of chapter 6 tells us that the Lord "spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them orders regarding the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, charging them to free the Israelites from the land of Egypt."

There is absolutely no break for them.

And no sign of hope, either.

No sign of hope other than God's promise that He will do what He has said he would do. He **would** bring freedom. He **would** conquer Egypt.

“Moses, you keep going. The cause is right. I **AM** working - even if you can't see it right now. Freedom **will** come. Moses, you keep going.”

Friends, would **you** keep going?

Remember, we'd only have the derisive laugh of Pharaoh in our ears.

We'd only see the suffering of the people because of the straw sanctions.

And there's be this insistent, accusing, dark voice inside reminding us that if we hadn't started this foolish exercise none of that would have happened.

At least the people would have maintained status quo. Sure, that wasn't great, but it was certainly better than what they had now!

It's your fault, Moses.

Your stupid dreams.

Your listening to voices.

Your fault!

Your fault!

Your fault!

Moses isn't the only bible figure to find himself standing in the middle of an awful predicament after beginning what he believes to be an assignment straight from the Lord.

By no means the only one.

Can you think of others?

How about Noah - told to build an enormous, sea-going vessel. Build it big. Build it inland. Build it when the sky is blue.

Works on it for 120 years without a threatening cloud in the sky.

What do you think Noah's neighbours would have been saying? Probably more than the occasional threat to call by-law, wouldn't you think?

Or, when Israel eventually was released - what about Joshua? He marches the people near to the city of Jericho. Then he calls the leaders to brief them about the battle plan to capture the city - talks about walking around it, about blowing trumpets, and about victory.

What do you think the generals said?

Or generations after that when Gideon was called by God to defeat an invading army of hundreds of thousands of battle-hardened enemy soldiers. Gideon hears God command him to send all but 300 of his own troops home. What do you think was going on in the mind of the remaining soldiers. Bet they wished they'd had a cell phone to make a last desperate call home, n'est pas?

Or the first disciples - Jesus looks them in the eye and says, "*Go and bring the message about me into all the world. I'm in control. Don't worry about what to say. I'll give you the right words at the right time. You go and convert the world.*"

I wonder what they thought about that mission?

**Impossible!!!**

That, friends, is so often how the call of God seems when we first encounter it.

And even when we take the first steps of obedience -

**even then**

it is not necessarily easy.

Doors don't always swing immediately open.  
Details don't always fall nicely into place.  
People don't always smile and cooperate in the way we'd hope.  
Results aren't always as positive.

Sometimes the road of obedience to the command of God takes us through a dark, deep valley of suffering and uncertainty before climbing to the sunny mountain top of success.

Anyone who has converted to faith in Jesus Christ and then heard His call to break free of addictions can tell you how rough and dark and deep that road can be - the body and the mind can both scream their objections to being free of whatever they had been enjoying: booze, drugs, sex - whatever.

The road of obedience isn't paved with gold, and there aren't always daisies planted along that road.

It can be a long trip.

And believe me when I tell you that sometimes  
yes, sometimes  
we don't get to finish the journey ourselves.

Sometimes the climb to success is left to someone who will follow after us.

The Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria began with the solitary labours of Johanna Veenstra. She firmly believed that God had called her to serve there. The CRC in North America said, "No." It wasn't right, they felt - time wasn't right, circumstances weren't right, money wasn't there. And she was a woman.

She went in 1920.

She served until her death in 1933.

She planted seeds of missionary obedience.

She, however, didn't live to see the fruit. It wasn't until 1940 that the CRC assumed control of the work she had been doing. Today there are far more Christian Reformed believers in Nigeria than there are in North America!

But friends, if you truly believe that God has called - carry on.

Keep going.

Oh yes, make sure that you've heard the call correctly. That's why it's so important to learn to recognize the voice of God when it comes into your life. That's why it is so important to associate with mature, discerning believers who can help you interpret the call of God. That's why it is so important to be schooled thoroughly in the Scriptures.

All to make sure you hear the call of God in your life correctly.

But when you hear it,

and you know it is right,  
keep going!

You probably have never heard the name Millard Fuller. He was a country lawyer in small town Georgia. He heard the word of God in the late 1960's to do something about the one billion people in the world that have inadequate housing, or no housing at all. [Bruce Larson *The Presence*, p.36]

Many people wrote him off as an impractical dreamer.

But Millard Fuller knew the voice of God.

He obeyed. He hung in there.

And today we all know the work that has resulted - *Habitat for Humanity*.

God's Word speaks us to a message of endurance and determination.

Hear it, please.

Hear it, and understand that as you are hearing it you are hearing a square peg message in a round hole culture.

If I had to name one of the biggest power-centres of our contemporary society, one of the great strongholds where the Evil One has influence and is able to compromise the progress of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ it is this –

– the whole realm of consumption.

We are an incredibly consuming society.

We love to shop.

We love to buy.

We love to consume.

We love to shop and buy and consume to make our own lives more comfortable. The more comfortable, the better. In fact, if something runs counter to our comfort, we can often just walk away and get what we want someplace else.

Think of how many grocery stores there are along the Merivale strip. If Loeb doesn't suit your fancy, go to Farm Boy. And if the variety isn't good enough, try Loblaws. And if the packages aren't big enough, get a membership at Costco. Oh yes, don't forget the smaller store intimacy that the Independent Grocer offers. Or the organic alternatives at Kardish.

On and on it goes!

You can shop where you want, when you want, for just about whatever you want. Nobody will stop you, or tell you otherwise, or force you to change. In fact, they'll cater to your whims and wishes.

And that's just groceries.

Same thing with electronics, cars, flooring, mattresses and just about whatever you want.

We are catered to, and waited on to the point of absurdity.

The frightening part is that the attitude which is cultivated by such catering rubs off in other areas of life. It can, if we're not **extremely careful** make us spiritually flabby, lazy and ineffective.

Tell me what you think - if Moses had been raised here in Ottawa, with a consumer, serve-me-or-I'll-go-to-another-store attitude, how do you think he might have reacted the first time that things got tough?

I suspect he might have been very tempted to walk away!

The consumer, me-first mentality is all around us, friends.

It shapes us as individual Christians when we go to church. We drop all loyalty to our local congregation and go wherever we feel most comfortable. We get involved only when it suits us and where we feel most fulfilled.

How far would such an attitude have taken Moses or Noah or Joshua or Gideon or the disciples or Johanna Veenstra or Millard Fuller?

It is a spiritually destructive mentality.

And it cripples not only individual believers. It can cripple entire congregations. I know of far too many church leaders that become concerned first of all with how they can keep their own people happy, and how they can cater to their wants, and how they can keep their numbers up, **rather** than with how they can hear the voice of God, and how they can best begin to follow down the long road of obedience to which God is calling their congregation.

It is Thanksgiving weekend.  
We have ***much*** to be grateful for.  
SO much!!

May I suggest, though, that as we give thanks we also breathe a prayer asking that any spirit of complacency or of self-centred consumerism be ripped right out of our hearts and souls and minds!

In our gratitude, as we take time to reflect on all the enormous riches that God has poured in our laps,

let's also be asking -  
asking as individuals  
and asking as a congregation  
"Lord, what are you calling us to do with it?"  
"Lord, where are you calling us to go?"

Last Sunday the elders and deacons gathered round and laid hands of commissioning prayer and blessing on Jodi as she prepares to go to Romania for two months of work among orphans there. She didn't want to say anything at the time, because she wanted the focus to be all on God.

Hurray!  
That's exactly the right attitude.  
Keep the focus away from self, and turned on the Lord.

Let me tell you just a little secret. Jodi is absolutely convinced that God is calling her to this task. In fact, he's been calling her for a few years. Her obedient response has meant that she had to quit two of her three part-time jobs. Her employers said she was crazy to go, and no they would not give her a leave of absence. She doesn't know any Romanian.

Things are stacked up against her.  
Things look bleak, at least from a logical human perspective, for when she returns.

But Jodi is excited, and ready.  
She said to me, "God has called me. And I know that whatever He has planned will be right."

I praise God that the consumer spirit hasn't sucked Jodi under.  
And I pray that the witness and example of this sister in the Lord will multiply through our congregation.

To the glory of God!