**Session 8: Week 5a**

***God of Deliverance***

**Exodus 5:1-23**

**3-4 October 2022**

**Recap** – We saw last week the wonderful scene in which Moses and Aaron proclaim to the elders of Israel all that the mighty hand of God is going to do for them and that they responded with belief and worship. We saw both the perfect obedience of Moses and Aaron and the perfect response of the children of God. But when things get difficult, we are tested in our resolve. God has been faithful to set an expectation of deliverance, but what happens initially does not at all *feel* like deliverance to the Hebrews. They wonder, “Are you really who you say you are?” The Lord has told them exactly what will happen, but when hardship does come upon them, there is surprise and dismay and shock.

**The Conflict of the Two “I Am’s”** – Moses and Aaron now meet with Pharaoh and the Egyptians to deliver God’s message to them. They use a “formula” statement that will be used over and over again in Old Testament writings: “Thus says the Lord.” This is the language of a prophet of God. Jesus will pick up on this statement and revise it to indicate that He is not just a prophet but God Himself: “You have heard it said…but **I say to you**…” or “Truly, truly **I say to you**…” So Moses uses this phrase to introduce the message that the Lord (i.e. Yahweh) has for Pharaoh. But Pharaoh, who is worshiped by the Egyptians as a god, asks, “Who is Yahweh? I don’t know him, and I won’t do what he says.”

**Moses’ Response** – Moses and Aaron clarify that they are talking about “the God of the Hebrews.” They tell Pharaoh that they owe obedience to Him, and if they don’t obey, negatives consequences will fall upon them (i.e. the Hebrews). They present their initial “soft” request to be allowed to go into the wilderness a three days’ journey so they can offer sacrifices to the Lord.

**Pharoah’s New Scheme** – He accuses the Hebrews of laziness, and he increases their workload cruelly by saying that they have to continue producing the same number of bricks but will no longer be supplied with the straw to strengthen the bricks; they have to gather the straw themselves. His intention is to wear the people out so they will have no time or energy to listen to the words of this Yahweh. Pharaoh says that by listening to what Moses and Aaron told them, the Hebrews are “resting” from their required work. (It is ironic that in just two and a half months God will not only give the Hebrews rest, but demand that they observe it!) But at this point Pharaoh makes an almost impossibly hard task even harder. By denying the Hebrews the straw necessary to make bricks, Pharaoh intends to break their will, and he mocks their “God” by using the same formula for his own command that Yahweh had used, “Thus says Pharaoh…”

**Divide and Conquer** – Pharaoh scatters the Hebrews throughout Egypt again, this time to gather straw for the bricks. His purpose is to keep them from uniting to thwart his authority, and he succeeds in crushing their spirit. Not only that, but the punishment for not meeting the daily quota of bricks falls on the Israelite *foremen*. Why? If Pharaoh can break the leaders, then the rest of the people will follow. This ploy has the desired result of turning the foremen against Moses and Aaron, further dividing the people.

**When Life Blows Up** – Moses and Aaron have obeyed God perfectly, doing *exactly* what He has told them to do, and yet everything is falling apart. They respond much as we do when life blows up in our faces, and we ask God, “Why is this happening to me? Didn’t I do \_\_\_\_\_ just as You asked me to?” We default to thinking that if we obey God, then life should go smoothly for us. But when we examine the scriptures carefully, we find that God tells us what obedience looks like. Those who are obedient to a holy God in a land that is populated by Pharaoh and his followers should expect to be treated just like the One who lived a perfect life of obedience was treated. We are so surprised because we have thought that a life of obedience would be a life of ease. We fear the wrong things, and we need to remember the example of the Hebrew midwives, who feared God more than they feared Pharaoh.

**Pouring Out His Heart** – Moses pours all his frustration and disappointment and bewilderment out to the Lord. It is an honest outpouring of grief far more than it is an expression of unbelief. It shows us the wrong thinking that Moses must wrestle to the ground. He has mistakenly thought, just as Israel has thought, that if he did his piece, there would be smooth paths and success and favor. Next week we will see how the Lord responds to Moses, to strengthen and encourage him to continue to trust Him and obey.