

THE CHURCH AT OAKWOOD

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The Word Spoken

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We are not familiar with the idea or the concept of “kingdoms.” We are not familiar with them in a very real and intimate sense because our society, our culture is operating in a democratic republic. We choose our leaders. We are able to voice dissent and in some instances with the appropriate influence, we can have laws changed. Kingdoms are not that way.

Kingdoms have rulers whose presence, name and very character define every aspect of the nation over which they rule. In some cases there have been kingdoms that have ruled by very loving monarchs or kings who have sought the best interest of their kingdom and people. Then there have been other types of kingdoms where rulers have ruled with such a heavy hand, that the sinful pride of their might led to the eventual destruction of their kingdom.

Our text today brings us to the opening round, the collision between God-YHWH- who is LORD over heaven and earth; and Pharaoh King of Egypt. As I preached in Exodus 3, this is not a collision between equal kings. This is creation meeting Creator. It is the imperfect vessel of wrath that is about to be used with skill by the Master Creator-God.

This point forward I want you to keep in the back of your mind that the LORD through his prophet Moses is declaring himself not only King over Hebrew slaves- who have been crying and groaning because of their affliction- he is King over all kingdoms and rulers as well. God is declaring that his holiness, his power and his glory are a few of the supreme announcements that he is indeed LORD and King.

“The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them” (Exodus 7:5)

“But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name be proclaimed in all the earth” (Exodus 9:16)

“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD” (Exodus 14:4)

A critical aspect of any kingdom or government is speaking the word of the king and obeying that word. To disobey the word invites swift punishment while obedience invites some level of blessing or favor from the ruler.

In our text I want us to look at the “word” spoken by these two kings and their mouthpieces and the responses to their proclaimed word. In Exodus 5:1-9 we will look at what happens when “YHWH’s word is spoken.” Then in verses 10-14 we will look at what is produced when “Pharaoh’s word is spoken.” In verse 15-21 the “Israelites word is spoken.” We will then conclude with verses 22-6:1 as it is only appropriate, when “YHWH’s word is once again spoken.” It is not only appropriate but it is right that God would have the last word, that every mouth would be silent.

Exodus 5:1-9: YHWH’s Word is spoken

Moses and his brother Aaron are headed back to Egypt to address a new Pharaoh. They are taking with them the Word of God to declare to this new Pharaoh that he is to set them free in order that they would worship God (Ex 3:12; 5:1). This is a new Pharaoh because God has spoken to Moses and said to him in Exodus 4:19 “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.” So this Pharaoh that Moses and Aaron will be speaking to is not the Pharaoh who sought to put the Hebrew boys to death (1:16) or who sought Moses because Moses had killed an Egyptian (Ex 2:15). We have a new Moses who is continuing the building work of his father Rameses II and we will see he is continuing this work through oppression and affliction.

Egypt is split into two main regions-Upper and Lower Egypt. Moses and Aaron are headed to the city of Ramses which is the main city in the North. This is the city that the Hebrews were forced to build for Pharaoh in Exodus 1:11. Let us realize that the Exodus story occurred in real history. God arrived into human history with his word to announce his deliverance and ultimate rule over kingdoms, rulers and people. Moses and Aaron are confronting great idolatry, wickedness and oppression which is about to be judged in the pronouncement of this good news in verse 1, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness” and verse 3, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.”

Here we see in the mouth of Aaron the announcement that YHWH is demanding the freedom of his people in order that he would be freely worshipped. God has sent his prophet Moses with his word to call for the liberation of Hebrews so that their worship would be without any obstacle. Free of taskmasters, free of afflictions. That there would be worship characterized by joy and not groaning, tears of satisfaction and not pain. In the announcement of YHWH’s word we also hear the threat of sickness and war. This announcement has very significant and life

changing weight within it. Obedience to the word of the King-the LORD, the God of Israel- will bring blessing found in worship or a slow death in sickness or a quick death by the sword.

Yet the writer of the Exodus reveals to us that when YHWH's word is spoken, rebellion which is rooted in unbelief is a real possibility. Look at verse 2, "But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD..." Or look at verse 4, "Moses and Aaron why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens."

Pharaoh's response to YHWH'S word is a response of unbelief which is revealed in disobedience and self-exaltation. His disobedience to the word is tied to not "knowing the LORD." Pharaoh is not acquainted with nor has knowledge of God. He is not familiar with his name or what God is able to accomplish.

What is the result of an individual or family that does not know the LORD?

"There arose another generation [Israelites] after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals" (Judges 2:10-11)

"Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD...Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt" (1 Samuel 2:12, 17).

I want to point out to you that Pharaoh is already in unbelief. It is not until the first plague in Exodus 7 that God says that "Pharaoh's heart is hardened." I am going to go out on a limb here and suggest that Pharaoh was unbelief was already in operation and God compounded that unbelief with each sign and refusal to listen to his word. Here is a king who openly confesses his unbelief and out of that unbelief acts in a manner that is oppressive to the people and reveals that his name, his power and his glory will be known.

This is a testimony to nature of the heart of men and women who are not born again and have not seen the kingdom of God ruled by Christ Jesus. Apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit who has been sent by the Father and the Son, you will not believe God's word. You will hear his word spoken and because of your unbelief-you will walk in disobedience. It is the nature of everyone man and woman born into our world. So it is for this reason we pray. We cry out to the Father to hear our prayer and work by his Spirit to bring about faith in him and his word. Without his sovereign work, we are believing our own word and crafting our own little kingdoms.

Which leads me to my second point that Pharaoh's refusal to obey the word of YHWH is from a desire of self-exaltation. The Hebrews are serving the Egyptians who are known for their massive and unique buildings, pyramids and obelisks. When these structures and statues were built it was the Pharaoh who received the praise. Can you hear it running underneath his response to Moses and Aaron? "Are you serious Moses and Aaron? You are taking the people away from exalting my name through their work!"

So, Pharaoh's response to the spoken word of YHWH is disobedient, self-exalting and finally idolatrous. Look at verses 6-9. The earthly king Pharaoh rejects the word of the living God proceeding to make his own announcement that is oppressive, false and blasphemous. The announcement is oppressive because Pharaoh restricts his government from providing straw which is necessary to make bricks, requiring the people to gather the straw and still make the same daily quota. It is false because Pharaoh accuses the people of being "lazy ones." This very emphatic charge from Pharaoh charges the Hebrews of being slothful and weak. Finally his announcement is blasphemous because he calls the words of God spoken by Moses and Aaron-lying words or deceitful promises. "You will not be delivered Hebrews. These men are liars. This YHWH has not appeared to them."

This is a collision between two kingdoms. The eternal King who has come down to deliver these Israelites, has his word pronounced by a stuttering prophet and his word is met with disobedience, self-exaltation, oppression, false accusations and blasphemy. Instead of Pharaoh being obedient, he in reality reveals the omniscience of God, who declared,

"But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand"
(Exodus 3:19).

Exodus 5:10-14: Pharaoh's Word is spoken

The problem with the kingdoms humans create is there is always the potential for oppression to exist. We have this temptation to take power and use it at the expense of others rather than use power to be a lovely benefit to others.

Maybe the writer of Exodus was intentional here but we see can see a parallel between God who is King overall and Pharaoh who is simply King of Egypt. In verses 10-14 what does Pharaoh do to exert the knowledge, power and glory of kingship? Look at these elements: messengers are sent to the people in the form of taskmasters and servants in verse 10 and the language of "Thus says Pharaoh is used in announcing the word of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh is defiant to the word of YHWH and positions himself as not giving a word of good news—"I will let you go" but a word that is both burdensome and brutal—"I will not give you straw." The results that are produced throughout the land of Egypt are increased burdens for the Hebrews and increased beatings.

Pharaoh's word increases the burden of the people because now, the Hebrew people are required to meet their same daily quota and gather their own straw. Pharaoh has created an environment in which labor has become overwhelming and certainly unfair, as the people are required to produce quality bricks which will go towards the exaltation of Pharaoh and Egypt.

Allow me to show you one of the reasons this event is included in the Exodus story. When the people eventually are brought out of Egypt and they are gathered around the mountain of God, God through his prophet Moses instructs the people regarding their treatment of the poor. Their treatment of poor brothers is to be honorable because it is a reminder of their treatment as slaves in Egypt. If they were to do otherwise, if they were to mistreat those who were poor among them; the Israelites would not be a reflection of the redeeming mercy of God but a reflection of the oppressive Pharaoh.

"If your brother becomes poor beside you and sell himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave:.. "For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God" (Leviticus 25:39, 42-43).

Now there is another portion to Pharaoh's word that is oppressive, unjust and brutal. It is what we find mentioned in verse 14; "And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were *beaten*..." What does the word produce in the land of Egypt and in the lives of the people of Israel? It produces injustice in the form of physical abuse. The work conditions are fixed to produce failure regarding the creation of bricks and the environment is life threatening.

The second reason this event is critical in the telling of the Exodus story is because hundreds of years later, as Israel is herself a nation with kings and religious leaders, she oppresses her own people who are poor and weak. God who redeemed Israel sends the Israelite people prophets to warn them of their evil and restore conditions that are just and peaceful. Yet like Pharaoh they do not listen.

"Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, "Bring, that we may drink!" The LORD God has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, event the last of you with fishhooks" (Amos 4:1-2)

“Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! They covet fields and seize them, and houses and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. Therefore thus says the LORD: behold, against this family I am devising disaster...”
(Micah 2:1-2)

In our world today there exist people and employers that are at odds. In some employment situations in Arkansas, employers take advantage of undocumented men and women from other parts of the country. These employers put these men and women to work in housekeeping or construction and pay them a wage that is not equal to the level of work completed or not pay them at all. These injustices occur because some employers are crafty enough to take advantage of the fact that the undocumented worker will not complain for fear of deportation. Then there are those among us today, I am sure have been in a work situation that requires double-shifts, supervisors that are not willing to be sympathetic when you have an emergency or demand sexual favors in order for you to advance in a job. Finally, in some Third World countries, there exist working conditions that are not safe. The health of the worker is secondary to the profit margin of a corporation who has brought their manufacturing job to that under-developed country.

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ addresses our economic systems of the world and demands of Christians to be imitators of God and walk in love regarding employer and employee relationships. We bring a word that is neither burdensome nor brutal. We bring a word that is just and loving.

Ephesians 6:5-9 provides us the command of how employers and employees are to treat one another. This command flows from the reality that is stated in Eph 5:1-2:

“Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

What is the instruction for those of you that are employees? Conduct your work in a manner that is accomplishing the will of God. Accomplish your duties in a manner which is reverent and in due time there is a reward. What is the instruction for those who are employers? I myself have now been on both sides of this. I have been the employee and now I employ people through CoHO. My treatment of employees is done with reverence in the sight of God to accomplish the will of God who we are all to imitate because he has redeemed us through a fragrant sacrifice. What about those of you who desire to work in foreign areas where working conditions are not the best? It means taking the power and grace of the Gospel to employers who are Christian and remind them of their duty in response to him who has redeemed them.

I wonder do you hear echoes of Exodus in the Ephesians 6 passage.

Slaves

Masters

Service

Threatening

As we return to our main text in Exodus 5, Pharaoh's word has been spoken producing increased burdens and brutality among the Hebrews. He is defiant to the word spoken by Moses and Aaron. Pharaoh has doubled down, refusing to let go his slave labor. And now that we have heard YHWH speak and Pharaoh speak; there is one other group who now seeks to have a word-the Israelites.

Exodus 5:15-21: The Israelites Word is spoken

Each of us responds differently when suffering arises. Some of us cry. Some of us become angry and shake our fists to the heavens. Some of us shut down and on our face, a very vacant stare that has no emotion and no sense of self-awareness. Whatever the case, however we respond to suffering, it will either be rooted in the belief that God shall arise and defend your cause or you have lost faith, seeking to find comfort in yourself, a person or something.

The Israelites have determined that in order for justice to be sought, they must appeal to Pharaoh. The writer says in verse 15, "Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, "Why do you treat your servants like this?" They lay out their case accurately, hoping this King will be merciful and relieve them of their affliction.

Let's see the contrast here. Previously the Hebrews because of their afflictions cried aloud and God responded by sending Moses with a message of good news which would appear in powerful deliverance resting on a four-hundred year old promise. Now after hearing that God has indeed come and the Hebrew response was belief and worship (4:31); these Israelites because of suffering, do not cry out to God but they cry out to Pharaoh. They cry out to Pharaoh in hopes he would alleviate their burdens and brutality. They approach Pharaoh as if he will have their best interest. Yet they find no comfort.

"You are idle, you are idle!" Once again Pharaoh restates his charge that was given at the beginning of our text. With emphasis, I can see Pharaoh rise from his throne, with pointed fingers charging the people that they are lazy and slothful. He charges them that their laziness is built on a promise given by a untrustworthy murder whose come from the desert and is telling nothing more than deceit and lies.

Where do they turn? Trouble and evil is around them, so where do they turn? When trouble, evil, suffering hits you square in the face where do you turn? Well I would like to say the right answer, the Christian answer of "I turn to God and his word."

I would like to say that I read and believe...

"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Ps 119:11)

"Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise; then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word" (Ps 119:41)

"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God" (Ps 42:5)

I want to say that I saturate myself with his word and believe his word in the midst of suffering. But maybe there are moments when suffering arises and unbelief produces all types of responses to my suffering. Maybe I am like the Israelites who when,

"Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel...they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery" (Exodus 6:9)

So their unbelief produces a response to suffering that puts them on the side of Pharaoh and standing not just against Moses but also against God. Yes that's right unbelief puts us in the position of standing against the word of God and God himself. When they should have embraced Moses and the word spoken by YHWH, they call for God to judge Moses.

These foremen have just had their appeal rejected by Pharaoh. Their worth ethic and people have been deemed lazy and weak. Instead of believing the word spoken, they call for God to judge (shawphat). The foremen as representatives of the people are asking to be vindicated by having the LORD they now refuse to believe, pronounce judgment against Moses.

In verse 21, two things I would like for you to see. One, their appeal to God is the pronouncement of a sort of curse on Moses. They are accusing him of acting wickedly by bringing this word. Pharaoh has increased their trouble and now they view themselves as victims in this domestic matter. This is a huge reversal as the people who believed and worshiped God because of the word of God, now, because of suffering are turning against Moses and by extension God himself.

Second what is the reason for this curse? What are they really concerned with? They stink in the sight of Pharaoh and the taskmasters. The Hebrews are concerned about what Pharaoh thinks of them. This word "stink" is *bawash* meaning how one person views another person or

group. They are a shame and disgrace in the eyes of the king of Egypt. Their fragrance is offensive to Pharaoh and they desire to be a sweet fragrance in his sight.

What do we learn from this statement in verse 21? The Hebrew slaves are so overwhelmed by their oppression, they appeal to the King who is YHWH to act as the divine judge on his chosen servant so that their aroma would be acceptable before this earthly oppressive king of Egypt. I wonder in our cries for relief from affliction it is neither God we seek to worship nor the event that is afflicting us but rather what we seek to enjoy and worship is our freedom from suffering?

The incarnation of God in Christ Jesus who is the risen and victorious king reveals to us-his Church- that we are indeed carrying about us a fragrant aroma. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17:

“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ” (2Co 2:14-17)

The word spoken by the Israelites was unbelief and defeat.

The word spoken by the people of God is one of triumph and victory.

The word spoken by the Israelites was concerned about the opinions of man.

The word spoken by the people of God is death to the perishing and life to the saved.

The word spoken by the Israelites revealed their fear of man.

The word spoken by the people of God is none other than Christ who has made us his fragrant aroma.

Exodus 5:22-6:1: YHWH's Word is spoken

So here we are. Pharaoh has rejected God's word. The Israelites have slipped from belief and worship to unbelief and self-worship regarding God's word. Now Moses, the prophet ordained, chosen and sent by God joins the chorus of this humanity and cast fault at God.

Why the evil God? Why the failure? Where is this deliverance that you said would occur?

Where God could have responded with infinite anger and unbridled wrath regarding his holy and precious name being denied and called a liar, God responds with reassurance. The word spoken by God is meant to comfort Moses regarding his unbelief and produce confidence in God.

Now! I will do to Pharaoh.

Now! With a greater might Pharaoh will let them go.

Now! With a greater might Pharaoh will drive them out.

What is the word spoken once again by the King of Heaven and Earth? What is the final word that is to go forth unto all the people-kings, servants, taskmasters, foremen and peoples of Egypt? It is the announcement that the kingdom of God is triumphant! It is the word spoken by the people who stand in God's redemption while Pharaoh's self-exalted name is made a footstool. It is the word we the people of God are to know and sing as it is found in Isaiah 52:7:

*"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "**Your God reigns**" (Isaiah 52:7)*

God has the final word...He reigns!

Let us pray.