

Campus-Wide Bible Study Fall 2013

Week 3

Exodus 5:1 – 6:1

For an opening prayer and introductory notes to the leader, see the OPTIONAL supplemental material document on the website.

Read Exodus 5:1 – 6:1 and pages 28-30 in Goldingay aloud.

Leaders: Use the provided questions as guides to your study of the text. You can choose which questions to focus on—some are better for groups who have new believers or first time bible study participants, others are for people who have a good knowledge of the Bible. You do not need to answer all the questions! Your role as the leader is to keep the conversation focused on the Bible passage or on the application of the passage to the lives of the members of your group.

Discussing the Text:

Moses and Aaron begin chapter 5 with the strong declaration, “Thus says the Lord” (a common way of introducing a prophetic declaration) but by verse 3 they are politely asking Pharaoh to let them go and then end by saying, “or God may strike us with plagues or with the sword,” something that God has not told them to say.

- Look closely at the text, do Moses and Aaron start out strong and then end in anxiety? Are they crushed by Pharaoh’s disdain? Or, are they already acknowledging that God is more powerful than Pharaoh and that God will respond to Pharaoh’s actions?

In verse 2 Pharaoh says, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go?” One way of reading this verse is that Pharaoh is scoffing at God and claiming that Pharaoh is the Lord of this country. That would mean that no one but him could dictate the life of his slaves. Another way would be to interpret this question as more genuine, that he does not know the identity of Israel’s God and is sincerely asking who the God of Israel is probably not to obey God, but at least out of curiosity.

- Based on your understanding of Pharaoh so far, and through reading and referencing the text, which seems to be the better reading?

Looking closely at verse 4-9, how does Pharaoh interpret Moses and Aaron’s request to worship God?

- How does Pharaoh evaluate them, are they a threat? According to Pharaoh, what are the Israelites for in this passage, what is their purpose?
- What are the lies (“deceptive words” in NRSV) that Pharaoh is referencing in verse 9, are they really deceptive?

John Goldingay shows that the words for “worship” and “service” are related and claims that God is essentially saying, “Let my people go so that they may serve me” (29). Furthermore, the phrase “Let my people go” from verse 1 could also be translated as

“Discharge my people” suggesting that God is commanding Pharaoh to discharge the Israelites from serving him so that they may serve God. Read vs 15-21.

- Do the Israelites identify themselves as servants of God or Pharaoh here?
- Does it seem that the Israelites have any idea that God is more powerful than Pharaoh? Who do the Israelites fear in this passage?

Linking to Christ:

- In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says this, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” The yoke in the Old Testament symbolized obedience and submission as well as political allegiance and justice. How might allegiance and submission to Jesus and his ways bring about peace in a violent world and in restless human hearts? How does obedience to Jesus create rest and peace within us?

Discussing the World:

Where have you seen people in history or in your own life speak words of truth to destructive powers and policies?

- What kind of courage or love does this take?
- What does it mean if God is more powerful than any policy or prince?

Pharaoh says in verse 2, “Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go?” Scripture shows us that God is loving, subversive, challenging, empowering and many other things.

- Why is it so hard to internalize the beauty and power and majesty of God?
- What are we obliged to do with the knowledge we have of God?

In an essay about meaning and work and destruction the author Wendell Berry raised the question of “what people are *for*.”¹

- Are we producers and consumers? A market share? Rational animals? The grades we earn, the respect we command, or the money we make?
- In your opinion, what are people for?
 - Based on your answer, what practices help people become more human, more alive? What practices dehumanize people?

Are there ways in which people’s work can inhibit their worship or service of God?

- When does work become destructive? What are some jobs or careers that demean people? What are some jobs that can make people believe they are better than other people?
- Where does service to God fit into all this?

¹ Berry, Wendell. *What are People For?* San Francisco: North Point, 1990. 125. Print.