

Exodus 7:1-7 “You’re never too old to serve the Lord”

This morning we are in Exodus 7 ... so far you’ve been through the first half dozen chapters - let me do a quick recap to refresh your memory: the unfolding drama of the Hebrew people in the land of Egypt is in chapter 1 - their numbers swelled and Pharaoh didn’t like it; the birth of Moses in chapter 2 and the unusual circumstances surrounding it, as well as the incident where his heart ruled his head and he killed an Egyptian in Midian; then his call at the burning bush to be the deliverer of his people - as well as a load of reasons why he felt he wasn’t the right man for the role - that’s all in chapters 3 & 4; that’s followed in chapter 5 by a glimpse of the harsh and cruel conditions the people endured as slaves of Pharaoh.

Then, in chapter 6, there is a turning point when God unveils his masterplan to Moses; he tells him 5 times: ‘I will bring you out ... I will free you ... I will redeem you ... I will take you as my own people ... and I will be your God’ - no doubts there at all!

Even with this mandate to be God’s representative before the Pharaoh, two times in chapter 6 does he feel that he’s way out of his depth - Moses said to the Lord, ‘Since I speak with faltering lips, why would he listen to me?’

Picture the scene - two old fellas, one of them dressed in simple shepherd’s clothing, probably with an aroma coming from their bodies, nothing impressive about their appearance - and there they are, standing before this powerful monarch in an opulent palace with a host of armed guards and well-dressed attendants all around. There are times, however, when you find the servants of God in the most unusual and unlikely of places - and this has to be one such case. One of them was fluent and his diction perfect - the other struggled to put a few words together and even more so when he found himself under pressure! Good point, perhaps ... he’s human like the rest of us; he has his foibles, fears, and flaws; he’s as vulnerable as the next man - a source of real encouragement to you and me!

1. The man God uses

That’s why we read what we do at the outset of chapter 7 ... the sovereign God could’ve turned and told him in no uncertain terms - ‘Moses, I’ve heard it all before. I’ve told you what to do - now go and do it.’ But that’s not what God said to him, that’s not how he handled his hesitant servant - our God is a loving and gracious God who patiently teaches us how best to serve him. So, in this case, he not only listened to Moses, he also answered his question.

The bottom line is that God would be to him all that he needed him to be, and still some ... when he stands before a stubborn Pharaoh, he would be there in God's place, he would be endowed with divine authority to do what God wants him to do; he would be God's mouthpiece - and, here's the grace of God, because he had jelly legs when it came to speaking to high powered people like Pharaoh, God would use Aaron to do all the talking!

God undertook for Moses in spite of his stuttering and stammering. We can look at it like this - Aaron was the prophet's prophet - he spoke for Moses, just as Moses spoke for God.

This is tremendous - for the same holds true in your life and mine even today. God speaks to people all around us and he uses people like us as his channels. It is helpful to note that Moses and Aaron were not in their teens, or twenties, or thirties - they were 80 and 83 years old!

When most folks would've opted for a quiet life, these guys were out there on the frontline - indeed, if you see what he penned in Psalm 90, Moses reckoned he was on the home straight, for he wrote: 'the length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength.' Truth is, Moses wasn't to know it at the time but looking through the rear-view mirror, he would go on until he was 120, so he was in the last third of his life ... age is no barrier to ministry - in fact,

sometimes our best years and most fruitful years are still ahead of us!

The American preacher D L Moody said: Moses spent forty years thinking he was somebody, then he spent forty years in the backside of the desert realising he was a nobody, and he spent the last forty years of his life learning what God can do with a nobody!

You know, it's amazing how God overrules in every situation and circumstance of life - on a human level, you would think that the reluctance of Moses would be a serious drawback and a kind-of a letdown, but, as it turns out - it pays tribute to the providence of God.

The truth is that Pharaoh wouldn't have thought anything of it when Aaron spoke on Moses' behalf - it was the norm for someone like Pharaoh to have a voice echoing all his commands! That had a twofold effect: one, it preserved a sense of distance between him and his people - two, it cemented in their minds that he had divine status!

So when Aaron spoke to him on behalf of Moses, you can see how his mind will work - 'Ah, this guy Moses, is in touch with the Most High God.' No matter how we look at it, it's a classic case of God moving in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform. God is behind the scenes directing the scenes he is behind.

2. The message God sends

The message to Pharaoh was straightforward - it was clear and concise ... in summary form, this was it: 'Let my people go!' It's the bit that follows which is hard for us to get our heads around - in verse 3, we read: 'But I will harden Pharaoh's heart' ... then he says in verse 4, 'he will not listen to you.' Well, at least God was upfront with Moses when he told him that his message would be ignored and that he and Aaron wouldn't get anywhere with Pharaoh!

As a preacher, I'm not sure that does anything for a man's confidence when he gets up and stands in front of an audience - to be told at the outset that you're going to be banging your head against a brick wall isn't a great start to any man's ministry. It's a bit like pulling the rug from under your feet! I wonder, how did Moses feel at that point when God made him wise to the outcome even before he'd fired the first salvo and got started? Did he have a question in his mind, 'Well, if that's the way it's going to be, what's the point in going through with it? I have other stuff I can do!'

There again, God's way of doing things isn't the same as yours and mine - God will harden his heart. Period. God used Pharaoh's rebellion to prove that God alone had the power to liberate his people from slavery.

We cannot fathom the mind and will of God - we're out of our depth. He said he would harden Pharaoh's heart - and he did; we see ample

evidence of that in this chapter in verses 13 and 22.

He is one example of the biblical principle found in Romans 9:18 that 'God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens those whom he wants to harden.' The big question is, why?

Well, God does this for his greater glory - for, as he said to Pharaoh in the previous verse, verse 17: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' God is God - and he does what he does because he is who he is!

Our friend Moses needed to learn the lesson that his role in all of this unfolding drama was to be faithful to his calling; God never mentioned the word 'success' to him - the results of his efforts were God's concern. So relevant even today in your life and mine.

On a human level, his message was a failure - in fact, as I've said, it was doomed to fail from the start. As the weeks went by, Pharaoh did not repent and he defiantly refused to do what God wanted him to do. I seem to recall that Isaiah's commission wasn't all that positive either - read chapter 6 of his book.

For you and me, we need to realise that God does not grade his servants by the number of their converts or the size of their congregations or how much they give to the local church ... he looks for

faithfulness, for love and loyalty, in the little things as well as the big stuff - that alone is the gold standard, and that is what really matters.

3. The might of God's word

God's ultimate goal will be attained and, as we read in verse 5, 'the Egyptians will know that [he] is the Lord.' Pharaoh thinks he can outdo and outmanoeuvre the sovereign Lord - well, he's a fool. No one gives God the runaround! There is absolutely no doubt in the text that this will happen, and it did! We can write over this whole series of incidents, 'and it came to pass.'

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob reached down and saved his people in order to prove that he is Lord - Moses needed to know that (Exodus 6:1-5), and the Egyptians needed to know it too! The plagues - all ten of them - had an evangelistic purpose ... as a result of these demonstrations of God's power, a smattering of the Egyptians would believe God's word (Exodus 9:20) for they acted on what was said. But, and this is telling, even those who did not believe would be unable to deny the power of God!

There's an interesting turn of phrase near the end of verse 4 where it says that God 'will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites.' It's a reminder that the Hebrews were God's own treasured possession, his covenant people - he has set his love upon them and he would free them from the shackles of tyranny and bondage.

On the day of their emancipation, they would come out by 'divisions.' That's a military expression and it means they wouldn't leave Egypt in a haphazard way, rather they would march out of Egypt like an army arrayed for battle!

Yes, our God has the last laugh - the final word is always his. He gets his way - and, in a few chapters, we find that God's people were rescued and redeemed when he stretched out his hand in judgment on the Egyptians and in mercy to the Hebrews! It has the idea of vindication wrapped up in it - the reason God has to judge Egypt was to protect his honour.

So, with the palm of his hand, like a Shepherd, he gently led his people out of bondage - while, at the same time, he flipped his hand and gave the back of his strong hand to their oppressors.

The lesson is, our God is gloriously able. And he hasn't changed even with the passing of time; whatever issue you may be wrestling with right now, remember this, God can do it! There is a way out, there is a way through to something brighter and better ...

4. The marvel of God's servants

Don't you just love the stirring testimony we read in verse 6 that 'Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded them.' What a magnificent endorsement of their character / steadfastness, and their total obedience to God's will. They did what God asked them to do - they didn't distort

the message, they did not water it down and try to make it more palatable - at no time did they try to curry favour with Pharaoh - no, 'they did just as the Lord commanded them.' May God help us to be as true to His word as they were.

Again, the age of these men is in sharp focus in verse 6 - they'd been around for a while, they'd seen it all, they were seasoned campaigners with an experience of life in the real world ... and God took them, enabled them, equipped them, and they delivered the goods, first time, every time! What an accolade - just a few words of warm commendation that say all that needs to be said - a bit like the welcome given in heaven to those who have run a good race, 'well done, you good and faithful servant.'

5. The melody of God's attributes

In closing, I want us to unpack some of the teaching which we have right here in this fascinating chapter ... these are amazing words - they tell us in verse 1 that our God is a God who communicates, he speaks to people like you and me; he has something to say, and whatever he says, is well worth listening to. In this chapter, he, quite literally, pulls no punches in his dealings with the Pharaoh.

He not only **speaks** - he also **saves** ... and that's what we have in verse 2 for his desire is to see his people 'go out' and 'get out' of Egypt. The focus here is on the story of redemption ... and ... because of what he has done for us, he demands

that we give him total allegiance - we need to put God first in our lives.

Here is a God unrivalled in his person - he says: "By this you will know that I am the Lord" (17). This is God drawing back the curtain when he revealed himself and said: 'This is who I am - Jehovah, Yahweh.'

We catch a glimpse of his personal greatness when he says, "I am the Lord." The word 'Lord' was so sacred that it was never heard on the lips of Jewish people. He is Lord of heaven and earth, Lord of the living and dead, Lord of time and eternity ...

he is omnipresent for he is everywhere, he is omnipotent for he can do anything, he is omniscient for he knows all there is to know - he is unchanging - he stands alone for he is God **the LORD!** According to Deuteronomy 28:58, this is 'a glorious and awesome name.'

We're also conscious of his personal goodness when he is portrayed as "your God." There's no need for us to fear or flee - here is one who can be known, who can be trusted. He's a personal God - 'your' God, 'my' God.

Here is a God unrivalled in his power - he says: "the Lord, the God of the Hebrews" (16). Here is the God of the covenant - a God who specialises in relationships. He is a God who rescues, releases, and redeems. And by the time you come to chapters 12-14, you'll see that he did it by blood and by power! He saves, he liberates, he

snaps every fetter, he breaks every shackle ... this God specialises in freedom!

Here is a God unrivalled in his precepts - because of who he is and what he has done, we can't talk back to him, we can never challenge what he says. He spells it out for us in easy to understand language - when Moses and Aaron spoke to Pharaoh, the message from God was unmistakably clear.

It's a powerful reminder that God will not **surrender** his throne, and he will not **share** his throne ... rather, he wants to **sit** on his throne ... it's where you and I come to a point in our lives where we joyfully sing: 'King of my life, I crown thee now!'

So, yes, we have the Lord - and we seek to honour and please him in all that we do. That's a win-win for all of us! Like the Psalmist, may we "delight in the law of the Lord" (1:2) - for when we do, the Lord will bless us richly (1:1). And, don't forget, you're never too old to serve the Lord!

7:8-13 ... the staff that swallowed the snakes!

This is a kind of curtain raiser before the plagues - here we catch a glimpse of the supernatural and the satanic. Let me highlight a few important pointers in this incident: one, the exemplary obedience of Moses and Aaron; two, the counterfeit miracles of Satan and his servants - essential to grasp that Satan only copies and corrupts, never creates - Satan is a counterfeiter,

not an innovator; three, the superior power of God and his rod - he always comes out on top; four, the perpetual hardening of Pharaoh's heart. One fascinating insight - God announces his ultimate triumph for just as Pharaoh's snakes are 'swallowed' by Aaron's staff (7:12), so Pharaoh's army will be 'swallowed' by the sea (15:12) - same Hebrew words used ... a foretaste of things to come!

7:14-25 ... the first plague

There were 10 plagues in all, each one designed to bring Pharaoh to his knees. The words means, 'a blow' or 'a stroke'. The longer Pharaoh resisted, the more serious and severe the judgments became - 1-3 were distressful, 4-6 were painful and costly, 7-10 were dangerous and destructive. The first is a miracle on the Nile River - the Nile was the lifeblood of Egypt but now, for seven days, it's turned to red blood ... the Nile meant everything to them - it was their mode of transportation, their source of nourishment, their standard for measurement, and even an object of worship! The bottom line is, there is no Egypt without the Nile.

Imagine the catastrophic consequences of such pollution if it were to happen here in the UK - it would be similar to cutting off all oil supplies bringing the country to a standstill, the stock market collapsing, drinking water contaminated, and no food on the supermarket shelves. It smacks of total chaos. And it was!