

Exodus 5:1-9

1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.'" 2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go." 3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword." 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!" 5 Pharaoh continued, "Now they are more numerous than the people of the land and yet you want them to stop working!" 6 That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, 7 "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.' 9 Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words."

Exodus is a book of movement from the evil of Pharaoh to the goodness of God. It reveals a contrast between the power of Pharaoh and God. Pharaoh was considered to be a god and denied the one true God that desired to maintain covenant with the people. While Exodus is about the liberation of the nation of Israel from Egypt by God, it is also the continued story of the covenant where the people live according to God and God provides for the people. Israel is different from all the other nations. Their God is proven to be the one true God, the powerful creator of the heavens and the earth. The other nations have false gods and sometimes make their king out to be a god. Israel is different because their God is different. Since Israel has an exclusive relationship with God, the story of Exodus is about how God intervenes to establish Israel as free people.

Exodus is also about how the people recognize God's authenticity and want to celebrate God out of their gratitude. Their bondage grew over time. The population grew and Pharaoh was threatened that there were too many of them. Therefore, he conscripted them to labor in the hopes that it would kill some of them. However, they continued to grow and Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill the male babies. Moses was adopted as a prince but had to flee as an adult and then he was recruited by God to return to Egypt and help set the people free.

When Moses and Aaron first meet Pharaoh the only thing they want and ask for is to let the people go in order to celebrate a festival to God. That is all they wanted, just to go and celebrate a festival to God. Here is a challenge to authority, Pharaoh thinks that he is a type of god and he has the power and complete control over the people. He does not have morals, ethics, or integrity, he only has power. Pharaoh is informed that this request is from the God of the Hebrews and his response is to deny this God. So, as a consequence, his reaction makes things worse. He figures that since the Hebrews have time and energy to celebrate then they have time and energy for more labor.

In Exodus we see the power of God, the love God has for the Hebrews, the consequence of denying God, and we see that the people are motivated to praise God. The God of Moses is proven to be the one true God, all powerful and involved in life of

people. The nation of Israel is forced to serve Pharaoh but they freely chose to serve the Lord. At this time, they did not demand freedom, they only wanted to respect and honor God through a celebration. The people only wanted to celebrate a festival to God. I want to emphasize that this takes place during a time of slavery. During this time of extreme hardship, they do not turn from God but desire God's presence. God's people had nothing to give; they had no resources, no finances, and no possessions. It is at this time of extreme oppressions that they appreciated God and wanted to celebrate God. What we have in the Scripture is a significant spiritual event as the people desire to celebrate, praise, and offer their thanks to God. In time they will build a tabernacle and then a temple. Here we see the roots of our modern worship experience. It comes from a desire to celebrate a festival to God.

I have the privilege of watching you grow spiritually with sincere appreciation for your outreach ministry. Through your willingness to serve God I see in you the joy of serving. Your gratitude spills over into your offerings. The more you do, the more you give, and the more you praise God. It creates excitement in the life of the congregation as you feel better about your ministry, your offering, and your hospitality. Not only do you help to change the lives of others, you also contribute to transforming the life of the congregation. You do not need or want personal recognition for your contributions because they are a gift to God. You help to make a difference in the lives of others and the life of our community. Thanksgiving is a national holiday, but the main thing we are thankful for is God and the special gift of love that God has given to us. For this we have reason to celebrate.