

Exod 03-03-23a

As we continue our worship this morning, let's prepare ourselves for the study of the Word of God by taking a moment at the beginning to square away our souls, to ensure that we are susceptible to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, that we have focused our concentration, that we have eliminated from consideration any outstanding issues that might stand between us and the Lord by way of unconfessed sin, or unresolved issues with others. We know, for example, that failure to forgive a fellow believer can interfere with our ability to communicate with God in both directions, and it's exceedingly important for us to acknowledge where we stand and to take advantage of the opportunity in the same way that if you rush through a meal, if you stand on your feet and run around doing other things and just take a bite here and there, it's very difficult to process that meal and get the benefit from it. We sit down, we ideally focus our concentration on our meal and eat it in a sense of calm and try to give ourselves the opportunity to derive both enjoyment and benefit from it, and this is our spiritual food.

So let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank you for your watch care over us, your grace and your faithfulness that is renewed every morning and is manifest to us in so many ways. We thank you that regardless of the outcomes in history and in circumstance and in situations, we are secure in our standing before you.

We are secure in Christ. We have a great potential in this life and in the age to come because of what you have given to us, and we pray that we will be able to seize and lay hold of what you have for us this morning from your word under the ministry of your spirit. We pray that the gifting that you have provided each believer in our assembly will be in evidence and will provide a blessing and that we will be encouraged to love and to good works by our fellowship.

We pray for our president and for those who are making important decisions both with regard to our domestic and our foreign policy, and we pray particularly for those who are in harm's way this morning, those who serve in our military forces, and for those who lead them, we pray that you will provide clarity of perception and soundness of judgment so that our national interests can be prosecuted not only effectively and professionally, but also in a way that is consistent with our constitution and our Christian values, the values on which our nation was founded and those which we seek to defend and protect. We ask your blessing again on us as we study together. May our worship this morning be pleasing in your sight and bear fruit in the days to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to the hymnal of Israel, the book of Psalms, Psalm 130.

Psalm 130. This is a song of ascents. It was one of the songs that was sung as people went up to Jerusalem.

Regardless of where they came from, you remember that it was always up to Jerusalem and

down from Jerusalem. So going to Jerusalem for a feast or a celebration, the songs of ascents would be sung, and this is one of them. This one in particular focuses on the expectation of God's deliverance.

This is the attitude of a believer who understands the plan and purpose of God, who is not imprisoned by discouragement. It doesn't mean we don't get discouraged or that we're not taken aback or that we don't experience sorrow or an ongoing sense of bearing a burden in some way. But, again, it is the view we choose to espouse.

It is the view that we choose to embrace. Are we going to condition our thoughts and our feelings based on this life and its issues or on our heavenly citizenship and the issues that pertain to spiritual progress? Are we willing to sacrifice comfort or sacrifice ease and peace and lack of conflict in the human realm, in the physical realm, in order to make progress and advance and achieve victory in the spiritual realm? The only way we can be motivated to do that is by hope. Do you remember our triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love? What is the role of hope? Faith is the means, love is both the outcome and the measure of a healthy Christian life.

What is hope? Hope is the motivation. Why do we bother? If we had no confident expectation of the fulfillment of God's promises, if we had no expectation of a bright, eternal future, why would we sacrifice in this life? We would be in the eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die crowd. Or we would be marching with a banner somewhere saying, peace at all costs, peace at any price, peace, peace, peace, because everything depends on my current state of happiness.

And if someone somewhere is discharging firearms or smelling cordite anywhere in the world, that is not peace and we must stop it wherever it arises. Well, that's as much as I'm going to say on current events, since I feel my self-control to be something already overtaxed this week. But if you look at Psalm 130, this is the basis for genuine, objective thought.

This is the basis for evaluating, prioritizing, and discerning how to proceed, regardless of what our circumstances are. Here is what the lyrics of this Psalm say. Out of the depths I have cried to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning. Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is abundant redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. What I find particularly fascinating about this Psalm, there are many different reasons for being in distress.

And a lot of times we are culpable. We have somehow acted or failed to act in ways that result

in distress. And we find ourselves, as a consequence, in the depths.

We are not penalized when we do that by God ignoring us. God doesn't say, well, you got yourself into that mess, you can just get yourself out. We have that attitude sometimes toward people who we've tried to help, and we've pleaded and cajoled, and they go their own way, they mess up, they're in dire straits, and we say, you know what? You got yourself into it, you can just get yourself out.

And it sort of plays into our ability to say, I told you so, without saying I told you so. We just fold our hands and expect to be acknowledged as the wise seer and wizard that we are. Of course, we ourselves have never shot ourselves in the foot.

The great thing that God does is He does not hold our stupidity against us. He does not hold our ignorance against us, or our just inability to cope. We're not always maliciously dumb.

Sometimes we just, we tried to evaluate a situation, we didn't grab the handle on the right answer, and we just fouled up. And it wasn't malice aforethought. We tried to go through our steps, but something distracted us, some weeds choked the word and rendered it unfruitful in that particular area, and we got ourselves in a bind.

It doesn't matter how we got there. It doesn't matter if it was inflicted from the outside, if somebody else pulled the rug out from under us, if someone betrayed us, as we're seeing in Luke chapter 22 with Judas, where we are in the account is even now speaking with the chief priests and scribes, and is going to not only, people don't often think about the fact that Judas did not just betray the Lord Jesus, but also the other 11 disciples. What does this do to their existence and to their expectations and to the security of their lives? Because the entire group is in danger by giving away their position at a time when they are vulnerable, which is what Judas is doing.

They're away from the crowds, which have provided a superficial form of protection. It doesn't matter where the calamity comes from. It doesn't matter how we fell into the pit.

Did our brothers throw us in there? Or were we walking along, looking up, and just stepped right in? Out of the depths I have cried to you, O Lord. Our life does not depend solely on our ability to avoid trouble. It does depend to a great extent on our ability to understand what to do when we encounter trouble.

Jesus said, in this world you shall have tribulation. He didn't say self-inflicted or from circumstances or the world, the flesh, or the devil. He just says it's going to be there.

What do we do? Out of the depths I have cried to you, O Lord. First line in the psalm. If we look around and find ourselves in the depths, for whatever reason, don't be shy, don't be bashful.

God is not interested in you doing some sort of penance. He doesn't want us to suffer. I always remember when I linked these two words together.

We were studying the little microscopic organisms. We got to the paramecium. They had these little hair-like projections that enabled them to move through the water.

We had a little science test back when I was in the single-digit grade. I don't remember when it was, 5th or 6th grade. What is the name of these little hair-like projections? It's a flagella.

The flagellum is a single one. The flagella is the plural in Latin. They get that because flagella in Latin is a whip.

It's a thing that you snap to inflict encouragement on a horse or pain and injury on a person. They talked about self-flagellation or whipping yourself. People used to do this.

They used to torture themselves for their sins. They would put on a really uncomfortable shirt made out of bristly hair and just wear it all day long. Of course, it would scratch and irritate their skin and give them a rash.

No telling what was living in the hair. This is where we get the expression, wearing a hair shirt. You just walk around inflicting pain on yourself, trying to do penance and pay in some fashion.

God is not interested in penance. You don't find penance anywhere in the Bible. If God wants you to suffer, He will give you the suffering that you need.

When He wants us to learn something by way of enforced pain, God will do it. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens. And He scourges every son whom He receives.

He doesn't hand a scourge to the son and say, go scourge yourself. So, don't take God's job away. This would be the equivalent of a child saying, oh no, I know I broke a will.

Let me go spank myself. I'll be right back. I'm just going to run up to my room and spank myself.

I'll be right back. As silly as that sounds, this is what we as believers often try to do. We penalize ourselves and say, you know, I've fallen into this pit.

I know it's my own fault. I'm just going to sit here a while because I know God is probably not interested in hearing from me anyway. God is not interested in casualties.

God is not interested in unfruitful soil. God is interested in recovery, in picking ourselves up and moving on. So, out of the depths, what are we supposed to do? The very first line of the psalm is, I have cried to you, oh Lord.

Lord, hear my voice. Forget embarrassment. Forget shame.

Forget the need for self-punishment. Go back to the Lord. If there's any punishment due, let God figure that out.

And let him sustain us in it and through it and beyond it. Let your ears be attentive to the voice

of my supplications. Now, why would we pray this kind of prayer to God? Are we saying, well, maybe he won't be attentive to the voice of our supplications.

Maybe he won't hear our voice. Does God always hear the plaintive cries of those who are in distress? He does not. He does not always hear the plaintive cries of those who are in distress.

Why? Your iniquities have separated between you and your God. And your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear. That's an Old Testament passage in the New Testament.

Jesus said, forgive us our debts. Forgive us our trespasses. Period.

In the Lord's Prayer. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us. A prayer for forgiveness, a prayer for restoration, will not be heard if we retain that kind of iniquity in our hearts.

The parable of the unjust servant who owed much to his master and was forgiven a great debt. And then an underservant of his owed him a small amount which he did not forgive. And the master came back and said, I hear you're not forgiving your underling there.

So I'm taking back my forgiveness to you and throwing him into prison until he should pay every penny. His forgiveness in that parable is revoked, which is quite an interesting concept. The point here is, we have to have the expectation when we pray that we are in a position to be heard.

That we qualify for being heard because we have done our part. We have forgiven those who have trespassed against us. We have loved our enemy.

We have done good to those who hate us. We have prayed for those who spitefully use us. We are not bearing a grudge.

We have not let the sun go down on our anger. We have forgiven others as we expect to be forgiven. Jesus explicitly says, if you do not forgive others, you yourself will not be forgiven by the Father.

Israel, by repeated and stubborn rejection of the word of the Lord, got themselves into a position where God would exact from them or inflict upon them a penalty. And it would last for a specified period of time, during which God would hear no arguments and would accept no pleas for leniency or lifting. There would be no cancellation of the penalty because of a pattern of disobedience.

So, we know we need to avoid patterns of disobedience. We know we need to be diligent to examine ourselves and see that we are in the faith. We need to know that we are standing on solid ground when we make this request.

Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. And he goes on to explain this very concept.

If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you that you may be feared. God does not hold our sins and our iniquities against us in every case or under all circumstances. There is a remedy.

We know, for example, from Psalm 25, 11, that we can request the forgiveness of iniquity. For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great. And when we know there is iniquity in our lives, we know that we can request forgiveness.

We don't need to request iniquity. There is plenty of that to go around. But there is pardon available.

We sometimes think, well, there's just 1 John 1, 9. And if you explain that away, then we don't really need to confess our sins. It is abundantly clear throughout the scripture, Psalm 32, 1 and 2, how blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. That is not the case for all of us.

It is by request. Psalm 65, verse 3, iniquities prevail against me. As for our transgressions, you forgive them.

Psalm 86, 5, for you, Lord, are good and ready to forgive, and abundant in loving kindness to all who call upon you. This is one of the things that we go to the Lord and request. And the very act of going to the Lord and making a request is an indication of attitude.

Psalm 103, verse 2 and 3, bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of his benefits. Who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases. He will not always strive with us.

You go down to verse 9 of Psalm 103. Nor will he keep his anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins.

He has not rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his loving kindness toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

It's a wonderful promise. And sometime in the relatively near future, in Exodus 34, we will see the Lord descend in the cloud and stand there with Moses as he calls on the name of the Lord. Then the Lord passed by in front of him.

This is Exodus 34, verse 5 through 7. The Lord passed by in front of Moses and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness and truth, who keeps loving kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. Yet he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations. Well, this sounds a little ominous.

So if my father or my grandfather or my great-grandfather committed an iniquity, it's going to

be visited on me and on my children? This is actually a school of thought. People have gone to Christian counseling where they were told, you've got to go unearth the misdeeds of your parents. Go see if your father ever had an affair or if your mother ever transgressed in some way.

You've got to dig up their... go back deep into their past, maybe even before you were born and find their sins. And this will be a key to your problems because you may need to go confess their sins and bring all of this to light and spill the hamper and air the dirty laundry in the family. Maybe your granddaddy had some kind of a malfeasance of some sort.

It's ridiculous. It's a clear case of not understanding what the Word of God says here in Exodus chapter 34. When he says, He keeps loving kindness for thousands and forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin.

If those can all be forgiven, then why would it ever be visited on the children and the grandchildren to the third and the fourth generations? It is because these areas of sin are sometimes followed by generations. If you have a generation in a household where there is a problem with anger management or there is a problem with losing one's temper and flying off the handle and that sort of thing. This can be a predisposition, whether it's hereditary or environmental.

It doesn't really matter. It can be a predisposition. It can be a pattern.

You often find that children fall into the same types of problems that their parents had. People that have problems with substance abuse, sometimes their children will have a predisposition to weakness in that same area. If you do not avail yourself of God's grace in overcoming and in receiving forgiveness for that iniquity, transgression, or sin, and you perpetuate that pattern of sin in the same area as your father and your grandfather and your great-grandfather, and you become a family line that is characterized by this, in Israel, in the Old Testament days, God would cut them off after three or four generations of apathy, indifference, disobedience, rebellion against God.

God said, if you can't clean this up, this is actually a reflection of the mercy of God. God doesn't just say, well, here's a man that's real evil and has a problem with going back to reliance on idols or something, so I'm just going to strike him dead. God says, I'll see if his son will do better in that area.

If the son follows in the same pattern and inherits the family terapheme and goes off in idolatry, God says, well, let me see if the grandson will clean this up. You can trace this pattern in the Kings of Israel, when you go through the books of Kings and Chronicles, where after three or four generations of a consistent pattern of rebellion and iniquity in the same area, God would cut a family line off. But it was a measure of his mercy.

It's reflected in the parable Jesus told of the field, the vineyard that was unfruitful. And the

owner comes and says, I want to chop it down because it's been three years now, and none of those years has borne any useful fruit. And the gardener says, give me one more year.

Give me one more chance, one more generation. Let me see if I can bring fruit from this. And that is a picture of the thousand-year generations preceding the time of Christ.

For 3,000 years, there was just a minimal remnant-type response. And as Israel grew and became large, there was just the faithful remnant, the 7,000 that didn't bow the knee to Baal, but the majority of the nation kept falling into apostasy. And the Lord Jesus says, I've got one more generation here.

Let me dig around and cultivate and fertilize and water and see if I can get this vineyard to bring forth fruit. And then if it still does not, then let's cut it down. And, of course, that's exactly what happened.

But that is the pattern throughout Scripture. God reserves mercy for thousands. But if there is a consistent pattern, and we can see this in our own lives, if we have momentary flashes of kumbaya and rededication, this is what I think of.

Because when I was a little boy in a denominational church, we would have summer camp. And people would kind of be lackadaisical and indifferent about Christianity. But you go to camp, and they've got the fire and the guitars and everybody's singing.

And, oh, now come rededicate your life. And people got rededicated every year. And the other 51 weeks of the year was all apathy and indifference.

But once a year, they'd be raised to an emotional peak by a week of intensive devotional application and talk about the Word of God and the love of God and the potential and the plan of God. And people would rise on that crest and say, Oh, yes, I'm going to be a missionary to Borneo, and I'm going to do all these great things and sing these little camp songs. And, you know, we are one in the Spirit.

We are one in the Lord. Not all the songs were bad, but gracious sakes, after the camp, it's like you go back to church the next Sunday, and the same little kid that was pestering you and making your life miserable was doing the very same thing. Oh, I thought you were the guy that rededicated at camp last week that didn't stick.

And this is something that can happen in our lives. We can turn to the Lord under pressure, kind of like the children of Israel in the wilderness, as we're going to see in our study. But God is looking for consistency.

Consistency within a family generation is the picture here in Exodus 34, 5 through 7. God forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin, but He will by no means leave a pattern unpunished. If we don't break that pattern and do something different in a permanent way, God will visit the iniquity upon us. Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 18 says, Come now and let us reason together, says

the Lord.

Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. It just requires response.

In Isaiah 44 and verse 22, God tells Israel, I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud, and your sins like a heavy mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. And this is a reminder of the same principle in 1 John 1, 7 through 9. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship, each with the other, us with the Lord and the Lord with us.

And the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. It is an ongoing pattern of life. All of those are present tenses in the Greek.

And it means if we keep on walking in the light, just as He keeps on existing in the light, we keep on having fellowship, each with the other. And the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, keeps on cleansing us from all sin. And that is the background and the backdrop for 1 John 1, 9 that says if we acknowledge our sins.

1 John 1, 8 often gets left out. If we say we have no sin, and we don't want to think about that, but we go to 1 John 1, 9, if we acknowledge our sin, He is faithful and just. And these are also present tenses.

If we keep on homologuing, saying the same thing, acknowledging God's view of our actions, He keeps on being faithful, He keeps on being just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. Once those transgressions are wiped out like a thick cloud and our sins are removed, that heavy mist, what does a cloud and a mist do? This is what the Baghdadites have been trying to do, create a big thick cloud of smoke that our pilots and our weapons and our little high tech flying cameras can't see through.

Heavy mist and thick cloud obscures vision. And if God dwells in the heavens and you have a thick cloud and a heavy mist, then communication with God is obscured. He says the obscuring factor of your sins and the thick cloud that befuddles you and keeps you from knowing where to go has been removed.

So return to me. Walk in the light now. It's been removed.

Why are you going to turn around and go run into a fog bank again? In Jeremiah 31, verse 34, They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they will all know me. From the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

This is a promise to national Israel regarding the millennial kingdom. So there are countless references to the forgiveness that is available. If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, if he remembered them and held them against us, and we tend to do this, especially when we're in conflict with someone, we say, I remember what you did.

We start dredging up the past. Sometimes people try to use this weapon against us. You think I've forgotten, but I know you.

Let me remind you of what happened back in the dark ages. Well, if the Lord was that way, we would never get anywhere. Because every time we came to pray, the Lord would be up there, Jesus sitting in his right hand.

Look who's coming. Look who's coming up here for prayer. The father and the son up there talking about what we did last week.

He's going to come in and ask forgiveness for that very same thing. How many times is this going to go on? That doesn't happen, because God looks forward and not back. What does Paul say? Forgetting those things which are behind, we press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

God is not interested in history except to instruct us. Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. But God doesn't bring up history to flog us and to punish us and to block our progress.

Quite the opposite. He can convert what was bad in the past into good. Romans 8, 28, 29.

God can work all things together for good to those who love him and who are called according to his purpose. If you're looking to fulfill his purpose, this will work together for good. God even worked together the betrayal of Judas and the denial of Peter.

Some of the two most heinous acts you can find in the Bible, and God worked those together for good. It's an amazing concept. There is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared, that you may be honored is the idea.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word do I hope. This song, even though it's called a song of ascents, is a song in the bottom of the pit. Out of the depths I have cried to you.

And then he says, I wait for the Lord, my soul waits. He's still in the pit by way of concept, by way of imagery here. When he sings this song, prays this prayer, the deliverance has not yet come.

But he says, I wait for the Lord, and my soul waits, and in his word I do hope. You hear about people who are in dire straits, and the rescue team is trying to get at them, but it takes some hours before they can dig the tunnel to the coal miners, or before they can dig a parallel shaft to pull someone out of a well, before they can take away the heavy concrete from someone that's in a collapsed building. And they try to comfort them, they talk to them, they say, help is on the way, just be patient.

If you'll wait, we'll get you out. The people that were on the collapsed freeways when we had the awful earthquake out there in the San Francisco, Oakland area. Be patient, wait, help is on

the way.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I do hope. It's not an abstract pie-in-the-sky, by and by hope. We have concrete promises from God that his deliverance is on the way.

My soul waits for the Lord, and this is pretty dire pressure. He says, more than those who watch for the morning. And then he repeats it.

You can imagine that in the tune, this would be a refrain that would repeat. And we'd say, you know how much I'm waiting for this deliverance? It's like people that have been in the dark all night looking for the morning. When the darkness will go away, and everyone who lurks in the dark, and all the dangers and the fears of the dark go away.

And more than those who watch for the morning, my soul waits for the Lord. Then there is an encouragement in the final few lines. Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is abundant redemption.

For he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. And when you look at these words in Hebrew, for with the Lord there is *chesed*. There is loyal love.

There is grace to help in time of need. *Chesed* is one of the most oft-used and most resonant words in the whole Old Testament. But it has to be meaningful.

We have to know the word of God to know what God's grace really is. And that's what we're seeing in our study of Exodus. Where we will turn now to resume our study in Exodus chapter 6. We actually have to cover just a little bit of the end of chapter 5. Here because we have a phrase here I want to point out.

You remember that when Moses and Aaron went out and spoke to Pharaoh as God commanded them. And Pharaoh rebuked them and said, there's no way I'm going to do that. I'm going to take away the straw for making bricks.

And great additional hardship and oppression fell upon the Israelites. And they said, well what kind of deliverance is this? We came in and welcomed you and we jumped on the bandwagon. And we're all ready to rock and roll to go out of Egypt here in this grand Exodus.

But you come in and talk to Pharaoh and the first thing that happens is everything gets worse. It was better before you came. And this is going to be a theme.

We know a little bit of where we're going, don't we? We know that in the future these same people are going to do the very same thing. Get out there and the food gets a little bland and a little repetitious. Oh, where are the leeks and garlicks of Egypt? We've gone from bad to worse.

At least there we knew where our food was coming from and we didn't lack for water. Now out here, everything is uncertain. Well, this is the first test for those who want to walk the narrow road.

I don't know if anybody's read Pilgrim's Progress lately, but John Bunyan, in his parable of the Christian life, includes this in his scenario of the pilgrim and his progress toward the goal. The distractions and the things that want to pull him off the road. Pilgrim's Progress is hard to get through, I have to tell you.

It's not a corker because it is so allegorical that the allegory sometimes overwhelms the forward movement of the story. This is just my opinion. I was an English major, so I have some basis for saying that.

But he does do a good job of illustrating what can happen as you try to go down that road. You have the swamp of discouragement and different things that come along. One of the things that happens as soon as we embark on this road is the first discouraging words.

Home on the Range seldom has heard a discouraging word, but if you're walking the narrow road, often are heard discouraging words. We should make alternate lyrics and put that in our hymnal. Life, life on the path, where always is heard the discouraging word.

But this is a weapon of the enemy. This is a tool designed to erode our morale and take away our motivation, take away our hope. So as Moses and Aaron come out from Pharaoh, they're saying, well, we've encountered the leadership and we got a bad news report.

Well, then the children of Israel get the word from Pharaoh and this news about no more straw and they've got to gather it and the quota is the same. So the officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble. This is verse 19 of Exodus 5. They saw that they were in trouble.

This is the classic situation. I can guarantee anybody listening to the sound of my voice at some point, maybe even now, can see and determine that we're in trouble. We look and we say, phew, I am in trouble.

This is trouble with a capital T. Well, the children of Israel, their officers saw they were in trouble. After it was said, you shall not reduce any bricks from your daily quota. So, verse 20, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them and they said to them, let the Lord look on you and judge.

Here we were, stacking all of our eggs in your basket and look at what you've done. Let the Lord look on you and judge because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants to put a sword in his hand and kill us. Well, you find as you go down into chapter 6 that this attitude doesn't leave after the initial shock.

God encourages Moses. The Lord speaks to him. We covered that last time.

You get down to verse 10. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, go in and tell Pharaoh of Egypt to let the children of Israel go out of his land. God's policy does not change.

You can see a little illustration of this in current events. The President forges forward with the

need to implement our national policy in a foreign land. Great swarming hordes of people protesting, having die-ins, the international community and the press.

There's great popular opposition to this and I'm sure it is discouraging to not have your purposes understood, to have your motives impugned, to have your character impugned, to have the worst possible things said about you, and yet to forge forward in spite of all of that and do what you think is right at whatever the political cost, at whatever the career cost. I think, as I've mentioned before, I think the Prime Minister in Britain, Tony Blair, is doing the very same thing. I think he is also a man of integrity and it is political suicide for him to be taking the stand that he's taking at our President's side, but he's doing what's right.

Well, this is what God tells Moses to do. Stride manfully onward, dark passions subdued. He will aid you, he will carry you through.

That's what the song says and it's a true statement. But look at verse 12. Moses spoke before the Lord saying, The children of Israel have not heeded me.

How then shall Pharaoh heed me? For I am of uncircumcised lips. What on earth does this mean? Uncircumcised lips? Well, that's what it says. The idea of the uncircumcised lips here is when the Israelites would look at the surrounding nations, they would call them the uncircumcised.

What does David say to Goliath? He says, you're an uncircumcised Philistine. That's how he describes him. I think maybe when he's talking to King Saul.

Even in the New Testament, you have the uncircumcised spoken of, the Acrobestia in Greek. And it was a term in Israel that spoke of that which was unacceptable, that which was outside what is accepted and permitted and approved. And so it came to be a term.

And this is an interesting statement for Moses to make because this is pre-Mosaic law. And it is a reminder that Moses has a very sharp reminder in his mind of the difference between circumcision and uncircumcision that took place on the way in. You remember the little encounter we reviewed of God making sure Moses understood the importance of circumcision and of being acceptable in God's sight before you go forth to do a mission, a lesson that our modern churches would do well to heed.

You can't go out to win the world for Jesus if your church is a fetid swamp of mental attitude and verbal sins. And there are many churches who are trying to go out and canvas the world to make proselytes only to convert them to being two-fold the child of hell that they are. And that principle is illustrated throughout the Bible, and it is here.

So when Moses says, I am of uncircumcised lips, he says, when I go to speak to them, I might as well be, in later Israel history, a Philistine or a Hittite or someone who is just completely unacceptable. They treat me like they would one of the Egyptians. They choose to view me as one of the Egyptians when I speak.

My lips are unacceptable. They are not considered clean. So then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a command, the very same thing that God has said before.

Well, what is it that makes Israel take such a dim view of Moses and Aaron and their word from the Lord? It's actually a verse earlier in verse 9. Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel that did not heed Moses because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage. Well, this goes back to our scripture reading. When we find ourselves in the pit, when we find ourselves in what's called here anguish of spirit or cruel bondage, what do we do? If the word of the Lord comes, whether it's on the lips of a messenger or comes to us from the treasures within our soul, ministered to us by the Holy Spirit, what is our response? Do we reject it? Do we treat it as coming from uncircumcised lips? Or is it the basis for our hope? That is the decision that you and I make every time we encounter discouragement, every time we face a challenge where we are tempted to just throw up our hands and quit.

We're tempted to just sit at the bottom of the pit or to start scooping with our hands and see if we can tunnel our way out. Or start yelling for help and trying to find somebody else to assist. There is a story that has been around for a long time where there is a fellow who is off and falls over the edge of a cliff and is hanging by the fingernails about to drop thousands of feet.

He yells up into the sky and he says, Is anybody up there? I need help. God, if you're up there, respond. Is anybody up there? And the heavens part and God comes down and says, I'm God.

God, here I am in my fiery chariot. Go ahead and let go and I'll carry you to glory in my chariot here. So the guy looks past him and says, Anybody else? Anybody else up there? And this is sometimes our response.

We don't really want to trust the Word of God. We're looking for some other solution when we're down in the pit. This is the choice we make.

Remember the example of the Israelites. God is about to do the most amazing deliverance in all of human history. It's recorded in the Bible for eternity.

God identifies himself as the God that brought them out of the land of Egypt. But at the moment that it's taking place, they can't see it. All they see is, Well, my immediate circumstances went from bad to worse.

So, boo on you, Moses. And they're about to miss it. Well, we don't want to make that mistake.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we've got one more detail to clean up here in verse 9, and then we'll move on into chapter 6.