

## “I Do Not Know The LORD” Exodus 5:1-9

Moses had been confronted with the powerful presence of the LORD, and he had heard God speak to him in accents loud and clear. Now, he speaks those same words to Pharaoh, “Let my people go” (v1). Moses heard directly from God, and Pharaoh hears the same words, with the same authority, through God’s servant. This remains the essence of preaching today – God himself speaking his word through his servant.

We might ask how Moses could be so bold speaking to the most powerful man in the world – especially in light of his former record of insecurity and uncertainty. Moses gives us the answer in v3: it was his encounter with God that changed everything. Now that he knew the greater I AM, he was bold to confront the less-great Pharaoh – the greatness of the human king was as nothing before that of God himself. We are reminded of the encounter between Jesus and Pilate in John 19:8-11 – Pilate thought he had all the power and could frighten Jesus into submission to his authority, but the Saviour knew that his Father in heaven possessed ALL authority, and Pilate’s power was derived and dependent upon him.

Here is the secret of real courage in the face of over-mighty men. When we are afraid, is it not because we do not know God, or we have forgotten him? As we read in Daniel 11:32, “The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.”

But how does Pharaoh respond to this commandment from the LORD, the God of the Hebrews? The summary is given in v2. Unlike Moses, the king of Egypt did not know the LORD – and it was this ignorance that was the cause of all his problems! Matthew Henry put it well: “Ignorance and contempt of God are at the bottom of all the wickedness that is in the world.” As it was for Pharaoh, so it is for those who hold authority in our own society – they do not know the LORD, and as a result, they lead us into the judgment of God. There are seven characteristics of this ignorance:

- (1) **Mockery** (v2a): “Who is the LORD?” Those who despise God and his people quickly resort to mockery as an effective strategy, since it accomplishes several things at once: it deflects away from any meaningful debate or discussion of the facts; it provides unifying ground for those who are willing to laugh; it causes those who may not be convinced to keep quiet. Calvin comments: “We may remark a like madness in all idolaters. Being intoxicated by their errors they boldly mock at God, and deign not to make inquiries about him.” Today we see this in the mockery of the creation narrative in Genesis.
- (2) **Disobedience** (v2b): “That I should obey his voice.” There is no intention of complying with God’s commandments. In his wilful ignorance, he chooses to hear what God commands, precisely so that he can do the very opposite! Today, we see this same determination in relation to the Sabbath day – God says we need it for rest and worship, so we do the very opposite!
- (3) **Defiance** (v2c): “I do not know the LORD.” He hears the name of the LORD, only so that he can deny him and defy him, just like the atheist today. Pharaoh claimed to know many gods and had no problem believing in them, even though there was no substance to them or evidence for them at all. In fact, he believed he was a god himself. Indeed, in his most confident moments, he would call himself the greatest of the gods. Today, we pride ourselves that we would never worship idols, yet we make an idol out of “science.”
- (4) **Self-interest** (v2d): “Nor will I let Israel go.” Why all this mockery, disobedience and defiance? Was it for honest, impartial, empirical, scientific, rational reasons? Not at all! It was pure self-interest, the desire for bricks and buildings. Such self-interest is the driving force behind each and every choice. Today, this is seen in the tragic reality of abortion.

Despite that fact that all the empirical evidence demonstrates it is a human being in the womb, self-interest overrules the facts and does away with the child.

- (5) **Hysteria** (v4-5): “Get back to your labour.” The apparent strength of v2 quickly gives way to hysterical over-reaction in v4-5. Self-interest, when threatened, is met with a combination of fear and anger that manifests itself in hysteria. We can almost imagine the great king of Egypt screaming at Moses and Aaron in utter desperation – “How dare you!” Today, such hysteria is everywhere.
- (6) **Irrationality** (v6-9): Produce the same number of bricks without supply of a key material, straw? Now the lack of reason comes to the fore. What the king demanded was impossible, but that did not stop him from demanding it! It’s almost as though he believes that his demand is as good as a divine decree – as though truth is flexible and can be moulded in his hands. Such is the irrationality of hubris. Today, this is clearly seen in the confusion around truth, “I will have my truth and you can have yours.” Since when does truth bend itself to our will or perception?
- (7) **Persecution** (v6-9): The Israelites had already been suffering persecution for 400 years, and now the king simply magnifies the affliction. There is no limit to the suffering that the agents of Satan will inflict upon the people of God. Today, Christianity has no place in the public realm – anything but the truth of the Bible can be permitted in our society.

Notice where all this contempt and rejection leaves Pharaoh in relation to the word of the LORD in v9. God’s words are false! Those who are ignorant of God treat the words of the creator and sustainer of all things as powerless and vain; they treat the truest and strongest words in the world as empty and weak – nothing good can come of such ignorance.

What we see in the response of Pharaoh, clearly on display also in our own society, is exactly what confronted our Lord and Saviour in his own life and ministry. From the leaders of his own day he endured mockery (John 19:1-3), disobedience (John 8:43-45), defiance (John 9:28-29), self-interest (Mark 15:9-10), hysteria (Mark 15:11-15), irrationality (John 12:9-11), and persecution (Mark 15:33-37).

What a terrible thing it is to be a modern-day Pharaoh, or Pharisee, united in their ignorance of the LORD God of the Bible. And how vital it is to be prepared to face such wickedness. As we have seen with Moses, it can only be done with courage if we truly know the LORD – we need to have such a high view of God that no amount of mockery or defiance or persecution can move us from our conviction that the great I AM will keep us and sustain us.

That was the path that Christ trod; it was the only way he could endure such sufferings. He remembered his Father’s greatness, as we saw in John 19:11. We need that same depth of conviction ourselves, as do all those who are called to suffer at the hands of any modern-day Pharaoh, like our brethren in Nigeria, or Cameroon, or North Korea.

But is it possible that there should be any such ignorant Pharaoh-Pharisees in the church? Sadly, it is not merely possible – it is all-too-likely. Sometimes ignorance is bold and brash, like Pharaoh, or the Pharisees; but sometimes it is soft and silent and in-your-heart, like Christianised people, children in Christian families, people who come to church.

Be honest with yourself – is there any hint of mockery, disobedience, defiance, self-interest, hysteria, irrationality, or even spiritual persecution in your own heart? There is one thing worse than being mocked and defied and persecuted – it’s being a defiant and mocking persecutor yourself, all out of ignorance. The Christ you have ignorantly rejected is ready to receive you now, to cleanse you of all your sin and draw you to himself, so that you can declare with Moses and all God’s people, “We know the LORD.” Will you come?