

# For Worse, Or For Better?

# Exodus 5:10-6:1

In the covenant of marriage, there is a promise made unto faithfulness, *no matter what* the challenges. The historic wedding vows, penned by Thomas Cranmer in 1549, still resonate:

“I, [name], take thee, [name]... for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part...”

Such promises are godly—reflecting a commitment rooted in love itself, not in attraction or benefit. God’s covenant with His people mirrors this, but with one key difference: God often leads us through *worse* before we see the *better*. As seen in **Exodus 5**, God’s remembrance of His covenant results in worsening conditions for His people before deliverance arrives. That sets the pattern: “For worse, and **only then** for better; OR, for better, **only by means of** the worse.” God’s intervention “For the worse”, inciting Pharaoh’s harsh edict, elicits three responses: first from the people, then from Moses, and finally from God himself.

## 1. Pharaoh’s Diabolical Wickedness (v10-18)

God’s call to Moses and confrontation with Pharaoh led to increased oppression: no straw for bricks, yet the same quota, and punishment for failure. Pharaoh’s irrational, hateful cruelty reveals a hard heart. As John Currid puts it, they were commanded to do the impossible and then thrashed for failing to do it.

Jesus, too, faced this kind of wickedness. Like Israel, He was subjected to hysterical, irrational demands—salvation without justice, peace without love, mercy without deliverance, patience without goodness, life without breath. *Bricks without straw* seems merciful by comparison. Yet it was God’s will for Jesus to enter the “for worse” so He could bring us to the “for better.”

This is the path Christ’s followers must often tread when God remembers his covenant with us. It often gets worse before it gets better. It feels as though we are required to do the impossible without the resources to do it, and then we are thrashed when we fail! Philip Ryken gives some practical examples: “A woman refuses a man who is not a Christian; now she is still waiting for the right man, but no one ever calls. An employee refuses to work on Sundays and gets fired three months later. A mother does everything she can to raise her children right and then watches them squander her love by turning away from God. A pastor starts to teach the Bible, but rather than growing, his congregation starts to shrink. It happens often. A Christian does what God calls him to do, and it makes things worse!”

And if this is our experience, how much more for believers in Pakistan, or Northern Nigeria, or British Southern Cameroon, or North Korea? Yes such sufferings are God’s path to blessing, as Matther Henry puts it: “What strange steps God sometimes takes in delivering his people; he often brings them to the utmost straits when he is just ready to appear for them. The lowest ebbs go before the highest tides... God’s time to help is when things are at their worst; and providence verifies the paradox, “The worse, the better.””

## 2. Israel’s Desperate Outcry (v19-21)

Israel’s cry in verses 19-21 echoes their earlier groaning in Exodus 2:23. Their situation was unbearable—impossible demands and brutal punishments. Likewise, Jesus became a stench to the world’s powers, drawing hatred from all those in authority, whether religious or

political, spiritual or physical, Jew or Gentile, Pharisee or Sadducee; they feared Him and hated Him and unleashed diabolical wickedness upon Him. In His cry from the cross (Mark 15:34), we hear the desperate outcry of one who is suffering the worse in God's purpose.

So too with God's people. When they suffer for the worse, we must not conclude that God has abandoned them – that is often the opposite of the truth – for worse before it's for better – as it was for Israel, so it was for the Lord, and so it will be for many of us – far from meaning we have done something wrong, it may be that we have done exactly as God desired! Let us follow the example of Israel and of our Lord when we suffer thus, and cry out to God in our agony and distress, casting ourselves upon him for mercy.

For let us remember that he will not test us beyond what we can bear, AND it is his purpose to bring us to the "for better" by means of the "for worse". His purpose is good and kind, and all the suffering will give way to glory, 2 Cor. 4:16-18. Always remember Matt. 11:28-30 – Jesus is not Pharaoh – He takes the heaviest burden Himself, so that our burden might be bearable, so that we can endure and attain to the glory.

### **3. Moses' Dependent Appeal (v22-23)**

Moses goes to God in raw honesty. He acknowledges God's sovereignty and asks: "Why have you brought trouble?" (v22-23). Hamilton writes, "He employs no nice clichés... he is discouraged, rejected, bewildered."

This is the biblical pattern: desperate honesty before God. We see it for example in Psalm 10, where the desperation and the honesty before God can seem quite shocking to us. We must be truthful in our affliction. Don't fake smiles; don't suppress pain. Let your desperate outcry be made known. God welcomes our dependence. Why is our society full of what we might call "snowflakes"? Is it because we have lost the capacity to be honest with ourselves, which is the fruit of failure to be honest with God? Moses and the psalmist, and of course the Lord Jesus himself, as he expires upon the cross, show us the way of honesty with God.

When we are honest with God, manifesting our total dependence upon Him in prayer, He will hear us and answer us and help us. Remember, it is a throne of grace to which we come, and our Lord is able to empathise with us, since He has been tested in every way like us, Heb. 4:14-16. His purpose is often for things to get worse before they get better, but even in the worse, ESPECIALLY in the worse, we can be conscious that underneath are the everlasting arms of our sovereign and gracious Lord, Deut. 33:27.

### **4. God's Definite Purpose (6v1)**

Every aspect of the "worse" is part of God's plan for "better." (6v1) There is no randomness in our suffering. Every burden, every cry, is used by God unto glory. As with Jesus, none of it is wasted. Remember that He is our champion, and we are IN HIM. All His victories are ours by faith. He DID make bricks without straw; He truly did accomplish salvation without justice, peace without love, mercy without deliverance, patience without goodness, life without breath. What Satan intended for evil, God worked for good, Gen. 50:20. Through all Christ's suffering, all His "for-worseness", God was working glory and betterness.

So take your outcry to God. Make your appeal. His purpose is sure: *for worse*, then always *for better*—in time, and in eternity. Unless you are not in Christ—then, all is truly *for worse*, and that forever. Come to Him, and find eternal *better* in Christ alone.