

## Living in a Fallen World

Exodus 5:1-21

We have a deficiency in our theology. Not in the doctrine of justification--I think we understand that correctly and accurately. Not in any of the doctrines of grace, for indeed we know well that we are saved by grace through faith. The deficiency is not in the study of the trinity, or God's decrees, or the person and work of Jesus. Rather, our deficiency is in our doctrine of suffering.

Simply put, modern Christianity is all too often ill-equipped to understand and explain the experience of suffering in the life of a Christian. In fact, what we want to believe is that while suffering might be something we have to endure, it is more accurately something we should seek to avoid. And the popular thinking is that it is something you can indeed avoid by living a godly, righteous life.

I have known more than one pastoral experience in which a godly, faithful, older saint was beginning to wonder. Beginning to question. Maybe I am not a Christian. I am suffering, and God is not relieving me of my suffering, so maybe I am not a Christian. Such a spiritually disastrous consequence of a deficient view of suffering, the devastating conclusion that since you are suffering God is no longer at work in your life.

That experience is not unique. And even if you might not actually doubt your salvation, you might well doubt the goodness of God's sovereign purposes when you have to endure suffering. You might well feel some exasperation in your own soul when trials and tribulations just don't seem to go away. After all, they should go away! That's what we seem to be taught.

But that is not what the Bible teaches! Not at all. Actually, just

the opposite.

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

There is great hope in that, "I have overcome the world." But with that hope, reality. "In the world you will have tribulation." Such tribulation is the direct and immediate consequence of,

### I. LIVING IN A FALLEN WORLD.

That's our subject this afternoon. Living in a fallen world.

Thus suffering is our calling! So Peter writes,

1 Peter 4:12 "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you."

Now Peter goes on, but I don't want to go on until you realize what he has just said. Suffering is the normal expectation of life. It is not something strange. Only with that understanding can you make sense of what Peter writes next,

1 Peter 4:13 "...but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."

So don't think it is strange. For ever since the fall, this world has been under a curse. God's curse. And specifically it is,

#### A. The curse of toilsome labor.

The curse of struggle and trouble in the normal course of life. So we read,

Gen. 3:17 "Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed

is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. 19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.”

God was gracious. He didn't take Adam's physical life immediately. But he did take away Paradise. Now Adam will have to contend with thorns and thistles. Now the work necessary to eat and to life would be been done only in toil. Work is now accomplished only “the sweat of your face.”

And that's what we have in Exodus 4. And it is helpful to see this account not merely as a page in a history book, but as a description of life in general. Life in a fallen world.

For the Israelites, living in Egypt and under oppression under a Pharaoh who didn't know Joseph, things went from bad to worse. They were apparently enslaved as brick-makers, but now the straw needed to make the bricks particularly strong would not be provided. They were given the same quota of bricks to produce, but they had to find their own straw.

v.7-8

Evidently they could gather only the stubble left from the crops, for hay didn't grow in Egypt like it does in a more fertile area.

v.12-13

That's a picture of life, life in a fallen world. That's a picture of our lives, too. Circumstances of your own difficulties shouldn't surprise you, therefore. So how should you respond to the difficulties of life? Simply with this realization, you live in a fallen world.

I say all of this not to discourage you, but lay the foundation for true encouragement in the Lord. That encouragement comes only when you first stop considering your sufferings merely as something from which to escape. That encouragement comes only when you are willing to join with Christ in his sufferings! Even as something to be desired.

Phil. 3:7 “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Surely, this is what the incarnation was all about, that Jesus would suffer as a man, in every way of our suffering, yet without sin. He would live under this curse of toilsome labor.

And so our fellowship with him is in our sufferings. With an obvious need to escape. That's why Paul writes,

Rom. 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

But we don't have to wait until then. We have a rest from our sufferings here and now. That's what the sabbath is really all about, a rest from the curse. And that's what the Israelites wanted from Pharaoh. A reprieve.

v.1

And, v.3

There were three main feasts in the Israelite religion, the passover commemorating their departure from Egypt, the feast of weeks or Pentecost which came after the passing of seven weeks of seven days, and then the feast of booths. All of those festivals were occasions of a sabbath rest, a temporary release from the curse of the fallen world. They, of course, had a regular weekly sabbath rest as well.

Lev. 23:1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. 3 Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.’”

Verses 4-8, then refer to the passover. Verses 9-11 the firstfruits. 15-21 the feast of weeks. And verses 33-40, the feast of booths. All with the same emphasis, “You shall do no customary work on it.”

Why that emphasis? Because God wanted to make the people miserable by giving them harsh restrictions? Just the opposite! He wanted to free them from the harsh realities of toilsome labor. The people of Israel in Egypt wanted a sabbath rest from their work so they could keep the feast and offer their sacrifices of worship. Thus the demonstrate so clearly,

### **B. The need for sabbath worship.**

That need continues to this day, and the NT book of Hebrews tells us that, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” There remains a sabbath rest because there remains a need for a sabbath rest because there remains the curse of toilsome labor. And everyone of us lives under that curse.

To make it worse, as if that’s not bad enough, we also have to contend with unbelievers. Some people get really upset when someone does something mean to them--it really shakes them up or even makes them uncontrollably angry. But again, this is reality. Wicked people do wicked things! And wickedness is at,

### **II. THE HEART OF AN UNBELIEVER.**

This is where liberal theology is so useless. It is absolutely useless to believe and teach that man is basically good, because then you have no way to explain or to come to terms with all the evidence to the contrary.

There is no room for pride in any of us thinking about everyone else, for remember, beloved, “There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”

God has saved us out of such a sinful condition, but it was our natural condition even as it remains the natural condition of all unbelievers. There is no such thing as “a good person,” especially when describing non-Christians. Certainly, by God’s common grace, no one is as evil as he could possibly be, but neither is anyone able to be judged as inherently good!

So why is their wickedness in the world? Why is there evil? Because there are evil people. And Pharaoh and his officers demonstrate clear and common aspects of that evil. Look at Pharaoh's first response to the request of Moses,

v.2

“Who is the Lord?” “Who is Jehovah?” “I don’t know him.” “I don’t have to obey him.” “I can do whatever I want.” So we have an unbeliever showing himself to be,

**A. Arrogantly autonomous.**

Even sovereign. He, Pharaoh, submits to no one. He listens to no one. He is his own authority.

That is precisely the fault of so many people in the modern world. And that is what you are up against. That's why there is such trouble in your life, because the essence of sin is the proud claim of autonomy. With that, and proceeding down a path of increasing wickedness, we see that Pharaoh is also,

**B. Selfishly mean-spirited.**

Really evil as we might say, increasing the demands upon the Israelites in a manner that can best be described as despicable.

v.4-8a

Using that as an illustration, people will still do that today, won't they? Perhaps not very often, but clearly at certain times, I have seen this mean-spiritedness in other people. It's very painful, even dangerous. In the quest of their own self-advancement, many people will think nothing about doing the most unimaginably horrible things with every sense of evil motive. It's bad enough when people are insensitive and careless, but mean-spiritedness really hurts. Yet for some people, that's what makes the world go around.

So wicked people will do wicked things to you. You should actually come to expect that, not thinking badly of people unnecessarily, but realizing that "out of [the heart] spring the issues of life." So the people of Israel no longer had straw for bricks. But it gets worse. The heart of an unbeliever is also,

**C. Violently cruel.**

v.10-16

I don't need to give you illustrations of such cruelty, but I should emphasize that this cruelty is abundantly evident today. Cruelty towards Christians in particular, horrible abuses and torture. Even murder. And all of it traced back to the deepest form of wickedness in the heart of an unbeliever, who bears the evil fruit of being,

**D. Spiritually antagonistic.**

In others words, it is a spiritual battle.

Eph. 6:12 "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Within this battle, you will be hated! Because God is hated.

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."

The example for us this afternoon is obvious,  
v.5, 8b-9

Pharaoh tells the Israelites that they believe a lie! And,  
v.17-18

He tells the people they are lazy and just want to get out of their work, accusing them of only pretending to desire to worship God. Where does all that come from? Hatred! Pharaoh hates the Israelites because he hates their God.

Jesus prays for his disciples with these words,

John 17:14 "I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."

So we read,  
1 John 3:13 “Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.”

Don't marvel. Don't be particularly upset or unsettled. This is the normal state of affairs, given that we live in a fallen world. The world will hate you. That doesn't mean you ought to make yourself intentionally annoying and obnoxious, but it does mean you ought not to be consumed with the efforts to make people like you. There is a spiritual war here, and ultimately you can no more make an unbeliever love you than a member of our military fighting against a Muslim terrorist bent upon the destruction of our country.

In spiritual terms, we are all soldiers. And we are all engaged in battle against an enemy who hates us. There is no neutrality. So Jesus declares,

Mat. 12:30 “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”

That's life. That's your life. That's the anticipated, normal expected, ordinary description of life. And in our theology, in our understanding of the Bible we need to recognize all of this wholeheartedly.

We need a place for suffering in our thinking, because surely we will be forced to find a place for it in our experiences. You need to understand what is going on around you. You need a framework in which you can evaluate the sufferings of your own life, and one of the reasons that is so hard for us to do in this country is because we suffer so little.

You who have suffered more, you who have endured more of the trials of life, you have had the occasion to learn these things

better than others. And those throughout history who have died as martyrs, who have endured unspeakable torture or persecution, they have learned it most of all.

This is serious stuff, not the normal fare in the fluffy and superficial religious sentiment of our day that goes by the name of evangelical preaching. And this understanding of suffering needs to be part of our system of theology.

So it is that people who have suffered don't give simplistic answers to other people's difficult problems. They don't lightly assume they can tell you exactly why God is doing something. They don't have all those answers. They are sober. Realistic about life, serious. But they do know the joy of fellowship in the sufferings of Jesus.

And they are the ones most equip to mourn with those who mourn. They have learned that the experiences of suffering are not something to be avoided at all cost, rather considered to be a privilege, that we might declare with Paul,

Phil 1:29 “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”

And after the apostles were freed from prison, we read, Acts 5:41 “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.”

That is what will keep you from,

### **III. THE TEMPTATIONS OF DISCOURAGEMENT.**

Yet, unfortunately, that discouragement is what we see here in our text.

v.19-21

I don't want to sugar-coat any of this. This is no health and wealth prosperity gospel. These are the hard realities of life in a fallen world. And these realities are a temptation to us. We get discouraged, dismayed, exasperated. We get depressed because of,

### **A. The reality of trouble.**

We see it plainly in,  
v.19

You may well look at your own life and conclude the same thing. If you have been deceived into thinking that God's wonderful plan for your life means that you will be free from trouble, you need to think again! And if that trouble discourages you, then you need to learn what the Scripture has to teach you about suffering. And with that, learn to put away,

### **B. The sin of grumbling.**

Here is where the discouragement surfaces in our lives, as it did for the Israelites. They complained to Moses. They blamed Moses. They vented. They unloaded. However you want to express it.

v.20-21

What a terrible sin! God had planned and arranged this whole circumstance, and the people are essentially calling down God's curse upon Moses. As if God were on their side! It is grumbling as the fruit of fear, for what they were most concerned about is the possibility that Pharaoh will simply kill them.

Fear does so often produce a complaining spirit, doesn't it? Fear of danger, fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of suffering itself. And we start grumbling, too. So what shall we learn from all this? First, to quote Paul's counsel to Timothy,

2 Tim. 3:1 "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

You and I live in those last days, and we will suffer at the hands of those who are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God," those who are "lovers of themselves." We will suffer because of the curse inflicted upon all mankind in Adam.

And I don't want to rush off into explanations of why. I believe that is a great trap that leads us to discouragement, the need to always have a quick and easy answer to explain God's providences. You can't explain many things about God's providences. You can't soothe yourselves from the pain of suffering simply by identifying some specific good thing that God is doing or accomplishing. It doesn't help to have to always answer the question, "Why?" Because sometimes the question is unanswerable. Sometimes, you simply do not know why!

Sometimes when you suffer, God will reply as he did to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And when that is His reply, then instead of grumbling and complaining, we can claim the faith of the Apostle Paul as your own,

2 Cor. 12:9-10 "But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will

boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

I don't want to leave you without hope, and we will continue into chapter 6 next week, where we will see God's goodness and compassion. We have hope, what Peter calls “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” With that hope, Peter continues,

1 Peter 1:6-7 “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Yet I will stop with verse 21 this afternoon because I want to dwell sufficiently upon this reality of suffering. We will study the sovereign goodness and graciousness of God that is revealed to us in our sufferings, but I don't want to run so quickly to that as to miss the emphasis here. Namely, the suffering of life in a fallen world.

The source of your encouragement should come first not from the benefits which you expect to receive in heaven, but from the work of Jesus Christ himself. So whatever your struggles, whatever your troubles,

Heb. 12:2 “...[fix you eyes upon] the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In other words, though you live in a fallen world, make it your purpose and goal to rejoice in the fellowship of his sufferings.