

Let My People Go by Jeff Strite

Exodus 5:1-5:4

OPEN: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SJrHDSIE7A> from 0:50 to 1:31 (it's the part of the movie "The Ten Commandments" where Charlton Heston/Moses confronts Pharaoh/Yul Brynner and declares "Let My People Go.")

There's an old Negro spiritual Louis Armstrong made famous back in the 1920's called "Let My People Go", and it went like this:

"When Israel was in Egypt land:
Let my people go,
Oppress'd so hard they could not stand.
Let my People go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land,
Tell old Pharaoh, let my people go."

It's a beautiful song. And it has such a haunting melody.
And the first time I heard that song I thought to myself "Yes. That exactly what Moses said to Pharaoh!"

And when I saw Charlton Heston stand before Yul Brynner and say "Let my People Go!" I thought to myself: "Alright. That's exactly what Moses said to Pharaoh."

And I've seen other movies with Moses confronting Pharaoh and proclaiming "Let my people go." And I've always thought "Yes, that exactly what Moses said to Pharaoh."

(Pause) But then I read the Bible, and I realized that wasn't "exactly" what Moses told Pharaoh.

When God sent Moses to speak to Pharaoh He said:

"I am the LORD. Tell Pharaoh... EVERYTHING I tell you." Exodus 6:29

And if all Moses had told Pharaoh had been: "Let my people go..." he wouldn't have been telling him EVERYTHING God commanded.

Take another look with me at what God told Moses to tell Pharaoh:

"Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'"

But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go."

Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God."

Every other time Moses appeared before Pharaoh he shortens it up a little, but each time Moses said: "Let my people go, so that they may worship me." (Exodus 7:16; 8:1; 8:20; 9:1; 9:13; 10:3 and 10:24-26)

7 times Moses appeared before Pharaoh – in Exodus 7, 8, 9 and 10 and never once did he simply say "Let my people go."

(Pause)

As I prepared for this sermon it occurred to me that the message God had Moses give Pharaoh almost sounded like they'd go out in the desert, make their sacrifices, and then come back.

But Moses knew they weren't coming back.

And Pharaoh knew they weren't coming back.

And you've read the story before... and YOU know they weren't coming back.

So why did God have Moses say it the way he had to say it?

Because there was something in that message that Pharaoh needed to hear.

And there was something in that message Israel needed to hear.

And there was something in that message you and I needed to hear.

So let's take Moses' message apart bit by bit and see what God was saying.

1st – Moses tells Pharaoh – "let My people go."

That was the first part of the message.

(Pause. At this point we showed a picture of an Egyptian Pharaoh's sarcophagus on the screen. The headdress had a viper at the top)

As I was preparing for this message I got to looking at pictures of pharaoh's online and something caught my attention. You see this picture on the screen? Do you see the headdress he's wearing? What is that on that headdress?

That's right, it's a snake.

A viper.

One of the sources read said that the viper stood for the power of Pharaoh to destroy enemies.

http://www.penn.museum/documents/education/egypt_jwf.pdf

(pause)

Who else do we know in Scripture who was symbolized by a snake?

That's right – Satan.

Revelation 12:9 says "...that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan"

When Moses was sent, God spoke to Pharaoh and said: "Let my people go."

And when Jesus came, God spoke to Satan -- and said: "Let my people go"

Jesus said... "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

John 8:31-32 & 36

FREE???

Free from what?

Free from SIN!!!

Down through the ages there have been churches that've shied away from that declaration. There have been churches and preachers that don't want to talk about sin.

Just recently I ran across an article about a mega-church out in Eugene, Oregon. It's called the "One Love Church" and their preacher Tony Crank went on radio and claimed that churches talk too much about sin, so he goes out of his way to avoid terms like "sin" and "guilt" and "shame". Those terms just aren't talked about by their congregation.

Why?

Because people don't want to be told they're sinners and they're afraid they'll drive people off by getting too much into addressing sin.

ILLUS: I remember visiting with one of my relatives who loves to play the piano. He had a book of hymns and I sang as he played (it was fun). Then we came to the song: "Amazing Grace". Sing it with me:

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a WRETCH like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see."

You see that word "wretch" in that verse?

My relative had taken a pencil and scratched that word out.

In its place he'd penciled in - that saved "SOMEONE" like me.

Now, why would he scratch out "wretch"?

Because he didn't think he was one.

He wasn't all that bad. Now, granted, he didn't go church and he rarely if ever prayed... but he didn't think he needed to be freed from anything. He felt he was a nice enough guy as he was, and that God would accept him as he was.

And there are churches who think like that.

They don't want sinners in their church... they just want nice people.

And that's the kind of people they talk to about Jesus.

Those kinds of churches don't really "free" anyone from anything because those aren't the kinds of people they want in their pews. Churches like that are more like a social club where only the acceptable are accepted.

But now, if we're going to tell people "EVERYTHING" God has told us to say, we need to be convicted of the fact that Jesus came to free people from their sins.

He came to free US from our sins.

He came to free YOU from your sins.

He came to free ME from my sins.

Jesus came to say to Satan... "Let my people go."

And that was what God had Moses say to Pharaoh.

But that WASN'T ALL he was to say.

God had Moses tell Pharaoh - "Let my people go SO THAT they may worship Me."

Why was God freeing Israel? (so that they could worship Him)

Israel wasn't freed of their chains to go live however they wanted. They weren't being freed so they could get together once in a while say "hi" to God. Israel wasn't freed so that they could worship as they pleased.

(PAUSE)

When God led Israel out of slavery, He brought them to Mt. Sinai where He gave them His law. There was thunder and lightning and sounds so terrifying that people were afraid. And God thundered down his 10 commandments, and first few words said this: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." Exodus 20:2-3

Essentially God was telling them:

You belong to me.

I brought you out of bondage.

You were bought with a price.

You are My people and you belong to ME now.

And God says the same thing to us: "... do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." I Corinthians 6:19-20

The people of Israel were being brought out of slavery to be a people who belonged to God. They were leaving Egypt to WORSHIP God!

And that is also why God freed us Christians from our chains of bondage as well.

What's interesting is how Pharaoh tried to deal with this challenge by Moses.

He tries to negotiate with Him.

In Exodus 8:25 Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land."

When it's obvious Moses isn't going to budge on this (and Pharaoh is under the gun to get some kind of agreement because of the plague) Pharaoh tries again:

"I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the LORD your God in the desert, but you must not go very far." Exodus 8:28

And then later, Pharaoh tries a 3rd compromise:

"Go, worship the LORD. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind." Exodus 10:24

You know what Pharaoh was saying to Moses:

Go and worship your God ... but don't go too far.

Don't get too involved in this "God" thing.

Don't take this faith TOO seriously.

And by the way, leave your flocks and herds here.
LEAVE YOUR STUFF AT HOME.

Satan whispers the same to us:
Go and worship your God but don't go too far.
Don't get too involved in this "church" thing.
Don't take your faith TOO seriously.
LEAVE YOUR STUFF AT HOME
You can go worship God... but leave your stuff at home.

And if Satan can get us to back off on our faith... he smiles.

But what would JESUS have us do?
"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. Luke 9:23

(PAUSE)

When Moses told Pharaoh EVERYTHING God told him to say, he said:
"...let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God"

Moses was telling Pharaoh... we're taking our stuff.
We're going to offer a SACRIFICE to our God.
You can't offer a sacrifice to God... if you leave your stuff at home.

ILLUS: One of the great honors I have enjoyed is to serve a church where people know what it is to offer God a SACRIFICE. There are so many here who offer their time/talents/treasures to God. They don't leave any of their STUFF at home. They're invested in God's church.

But there are others (as there always are in any church) who don't understand this concept. These folks need to ask these questions:

What have I sacrificed to God?
How much of my TIME have I given to God?
How much of my TALENTS have I used for God?
How much of my TREASURE have I offered to God?

When Moses confronted Pharaoh he equated SACRIFICE with WORSHIP.
I'm not sure you can do one, without the other.

The last part of Moses' message to Pharaoh is worth considering here.
"... let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God"

That little phrase caught me by surprise.
I've seen it before in Scripture.

How many days journey were they going to take? (THREE)

Why not simply say: "we want to go out in the desert to worship God".

Or why 3 days, rather than one or two days?

Well... because that was what God told Moses to tell Pharaoh "Let my people go that they may worship me... 3 days journey away."

I've seen that "3 DAYS" thing in Scripture before

- For example, when God told Abraham to sacrifice his ONLY son to God, you know how many days it took him to journey to Mt. Moriah where the sacrifice was to be made?" (3) When God offered HIS ONLY SON on Mt. Calvary do you remember how many days Jesus was in the grave? (3)

- And when Jonah was swallowed by the whale because he was disobedient to God you remember how many days he was in the belly of that whale? (3)

Jesus said: "as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Matthew 12:40

- And in the book of Joshua, when they're about to cross the Jordan River (that Scripture has equated with death) into the Promised Land (presenting Heaven) an angel told Joshua to tell the people: "Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own." Joshua 1:11

Isn't that cool?

Over and over again, this "3 day" thing speaks of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Do you think maybe it was an accident God wanted His people to journey 3 days to worship Him?

I don't think so either.

Just a few last thoughts:

When Moses came before Pharaoh he was told to declare EVERYTHING God had commanded. Moses was preparing to take God's people out of their chains of bondage and into God's Promised Land and that required him to tell Pharaoh EVERYTHING God's people needed to know.

And as a church, our commission is the lost out of their chains of sin and into the glory of God's love. In order to do that we need to tell folks EVERYTHING they need to hear as well. We are to declare that all folks need do to be freed from Satan's power is...

1. BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
2. REPENT of their sins.
3. CONFESS that Jesus will now be their owner. He will own that they have and all that they are. He will be their Lord and Master.
4. Be immersed in the waters of BAPTISM and
5. Rise from those waters to LIVE FOR CHRIST.

It's that simple.

But there are preachers and churches who don't preach all that because they don't buy into it.

Not my problem.

My task – and yours – is to preach the whole counsel of God in this matter.

We are call people out of the slavery of their sins and to declare to Satan: "Let God's people go so that they may worship Him."

CLOSE: And just as Moses led the people out of the land of Egypt the way that God instructed, so also God commands us to lead others out of the land of their bondage by the way He instructs us. As I thought about that, an old Gospel song came to my mind. Sing it with me:

"I must needs go home by the way of the cross, there's no other way but this;
I shall ne'er get sight of the Gates of Light, if the way of the cross I miss.

(Chorus)

The way of the cross leads home, the way of the cross leads home;

It is sweet to know, as I onward go, the way of the cross leads home."

The cross of Christ is the way out of the bondage of sin.

Without that cross and Christ offering Himself on that cross for us, there would be no forgiveness of sins. Without His cross - belief, repentance, confession, baptism, and living for God – would make no difference.