

## TRUSTING GOD IN DIFFICULT TIMES

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**Scripture:** Exodus 1: 6-14, 22

Today's theme is trusting God in difficult times. I'm sure all of us go through tough times, and that's part of being human. But as I was reading from the book of Exodus a couple of weeks ago, I was very much touched and so I thought I should share this.

Exodus 1: 6-14, 12

*<sup>6</sup> Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, <sup>7</sup> but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.*

*<sup>8</sup> Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. <sup>9</sup> "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. <sup>10</sup> Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country."*

*<sup>11</sup> So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. <sup>12</sup> But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites <sup>13</sup> and worked them ruthlessly. <sup>14</sup> They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.*

*<sup>22</sup> Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."*

All of us that our own tough times. Relatively, if we compare them with others, they may be on the higher side or lower. But one question I'm sure all of us always ask is: Why does God allow such trying or difficult situations in our life? Sometimes, we feel that God is out of control and Satan seems to have the upper hand. Is that true? If God is really in control, then does God have a purpose for all this? I'm sure that all of us will agree that these are very difficult questions. But I thought I'd share some of the perspectives from the Bible, especially from this portion, and let's look at three scenarios from the life of the Israelites and let's see what lessons we can learn and apply to our lives.

### **SCENARIO 1**

This is the scripture portion that we just read. I'm sure none of us go through those kind of hardship. None of us are slaves now, fortunately. And none of us are threatened that our children will be thrown into the river. But the Israelites had such tough times, and one of things I liked very much was v. 12. *"But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied."*

It was a very difficult time for the Israelites. I'm sure they would be asking this question: Is God seeing all this? Is He true to His promise? However, when this particular time had passed, and it's a reminder for us that God is in control. How do we know that?

Around this time, Moses was born and his parents tried to keep him at home for about 3 months. Beyond that, they couldn't. So they put him in a papyrus boat and floated him down the river Nile. We know the story well how God is in control. At the right time, the Pharaoh's daughter comes and takes care of this baby, and Moses is brought up as a prince in Pharaoh's palace. At the age of 40,

Moses thought he was the right leader. He was a lot of injustice and wanted to take things in his own hands. But we know what happened. He had to run away. The next 40 years was the real preparation for which God was training him – taking care of sheep. I don't think anybody here has taken care of sheep. If you know sheep, they seem to be the most foolish animals. They just follow the herd. They will follow whoever is in front. And God made Moses a shepherd for 40 years, and I'm sure all the pride which Moses had was all gone at the end of the 40 years.

And then when Moses was 80 years old, God called him. Let me read Exodus 2:23-25

*"<sup>23</sup> The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. <sup>24</sup> God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them."*

When we go through tough times, we need to trust God's timing. Why? Because God had given His promise, and at the right time, God called Moses. Earlier, Moses thought he was a leader. Now, after 40 years of being a shepherd, he was convinced that he had absolutely no leadership skills. And that's exactly the time that God said, "Come." Every time I read Exodus 3, I'm delighted. I think that's a very important lesson for us too. Moses had many objections and for each one, God's answer was one simple promise: I will be with you. I think that's all that we need when we are going through tough times. That's what God told Moses, and Moses was finally convinced.

After being convinced that God has called him, and being sure that God is with him, Moses and Aaron now go to Pharaoh. But before meeting Pharaoh, they meet the Israelites and their leaders. Let me read Exodus 4: 29-31 *"<sup>23</sup> The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. <sup>24</sup> God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them."*

So finally, as we see from what we started in Exodus 1, after 80 years, all the suffering they have gone through, finally the Israelites are convinced that God is concerned, and they bowed down and worshipped. They now knew that God was going to take care.

Exodus 5:1 *Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'*

And we know what happened, and how Pharaoh responded. Pharaoh responded by increasing their labor, making their life even worse. Sometimes that's what happens when we try to follow the Lord. things become even more tough. Then followed one plague after another; ten plagues in which God showed that however hard Pharaoh tried to resist God's plan, he did not succeed. We know that at the end of the tenth plague, which was the killing of all the firstborn, people and animals. That time, Pharaoh finally threw them out. Exodus 12 says that the day they were driven out was exactly 430 years since the Israelites were in Egypt. Why do I say that is important? God's timing is perfect. We might not agree. We have our own plans and ideas about our lives, but God knows better. The chorus that we sang earlier, the writer mentions "Every day of our life is crafted in His plan." And That's what we see here – 430 years to the day they were driven out. God's perfect timing.

## **SCENARIO 2.**

Exodus 13: 18

*"<sup>18</sup> So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea."*

Actually, if you read Exodus 13, it is mentioned that for the people of Israel to go from Egypt to Canaan, there was a shortcut through the land of the Philistines. But God did not lead them through that way because God knew that these people were not prepared for war, and if a war breaks out,

they'll get scared and return to Egypt. So God had a plan. God took them on a very roundabout route all the way down by the desert road towards the Red Sea. But there's something very interesting. In Exodus 13:21 *By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.*

I don't know how many of you have been into a desert, but once you're in the middle of a desert there is absolutely no way you can find your way. There are no signposts, no roads. Besides you can't travel by day, and I wonder how these Israelites did it. The answer is right here. The Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud during the day so they had shade, and a pillar of fire at night so that they had light. The cloud during the day and the fire at night was telling them: I am with you. The verse says that the Lord went ahead of them. I am with you. I am traveling with you. And that they forgot.

We know what happened. After a few days, Pharaoh and the people have changed their mind; their period of mourning was over and now they thought they had lost their services. So the entire army of Pharaoh chased the Israelites.

Exodus 14: 10-12 <sup>10</sup> *As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"*

The Israelites were terrified I'm sure. Sometimes, when reading this passage, we tend to criticize them. I don't know if we have been in worse situations – in front of them the Red Sea, behind them the army. And they have no power. But I want to draw your attention to this: What was it that made them react the way they did? Was it mentioned in vs. 11 and 12? "Was it because there are no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert." One thing they forgot. Right when they were grumbling, above them was the cloud. The Lord was with them, and they forgot that.

How did Moses answer them? Verses 13 and 14 <sup>13</sup> *Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. <sup>14</sup> The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."*

We know what finally happened. What Moses said really happened, and the entire army of Pharaoh and all the chariots perished in the Red Sea. It is all summarized beautifully in Exodus 14:31. <sup>31</sup> *And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant."*

Unfortunately, we see this kind of cycle happening throughout their 40 years in the wilderness. A crisis comes, God helps, they'll trust God. And at the next crisis, they'll start murmuring and go against God. God helps and again they'll trust. This keeps on happening.

**What are some of the lessons for us as to why the Israelites were not able to trust God?** He was above them in the cloud when they were grumbling as if to say: I'm there. But they couldn't trust. Definitely they were fearful and scared, justifiably. But I believe the greater reason is their inner attitude or their hearts. That's the lesson for us.

- Ungratefulness. They quickly forgot. All the plagues happened a few days ago, and still they forgot. The great deliverance they experienced, they forgot.
- Bitterness. They were bitter to God. Why? because God took them out of their comfort zones. Sometimes the same things happens to us. We are all comfortable where we are and we don't like God disturbing. God had much greater plans.

- Lack of trust in God's greater purposes for their lives. the same thing is true about us. when we go through tough times, we think God has made a mistake, and we know all about our life.
- Stubborn wills. To have things the way they want it to be. Again, the same thing we do when we go through tough times. Our wills are so stubborn, we don't want to learn.
- The slave mindset. They wanted to go back and be slaves again. Sometimes that's the attitude we have.

Sometimes, that's the attitude we have. God has great plans for us, but we don't want to trust. Think about Moses. He wanted to be a leader, and that's what God wanted him to be. but his approach was wrong. God had to train him for 40 years as a shepherd. And then he was ready. Similarly God has great plans for us, but not in our way. God knows the best way and He never makes a mistake. That's why I said, the 430<sup>th</sup> year to the day. – God was true to His promise.

We need to work at our inner attitudes, our negative attitudes. That's in our hand. That's where the people of Israel failed. All of us have our own dose of difficulties which will be there till the day we die. We need to work at these negative attitudes, otherwise our life will be miserable and neither will we be happy, nor will God. Very often we avoid the company of some people because they only have something negative to say. They are only thinking about all that happened in their life. But God wants us to be different. God wants us to be a source of blessing to Him. That was God's plan for the nation of Israel. God wanted them to be a channel of blessing. God wanted to show through their lives what God can do.

### SCENARIO 3.

Exodus 16 and 17. Let me read a few verses from 16: 2-4

<sup>2</sup>*In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup>The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."*

<sup>4</sup>*Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions."*

Now you can see, nothing has changed – not in their attitudes, behavior, or inner attitudes. They are still ungrateful, bitter, and convinced that God does not have their good in His mind. They are doubting God's goodness. Also notice that they mentioned that in Egypt they sat around pots of meat and ate all the food they wanted. That was an outright lie. They were slaves. We read all that happened in Exodus.

Now let me ask you a question. Why did God allow this? God has an answer. We know that God had greater plans for them. God wanted to take them to Canaan faster, but it was not possible because these people once again grumbled. And God said that the entire nation above the age of 20 will perish. Only the children will see Canaan. Deuteronomy is written primarily addressing these children.

So 40 years have now passed beyond what we saw in Scenario 2. Now Moses is telling these people who are now grown-ups, all that happened in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 8: 2-5

<sup>2</sup>*Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. <sup>3</sup>He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which*

*neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. <sup>4</sup> Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. <sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.*

Now, these verses give a gist of why God allowed it, and I think there are a lot of lessons for us to learn from here.

“The Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these 40 years to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart.” I am sure all of us will agree that when we go through tough times, all the negative things that are in our heart will come out. Whatever great impression we had of ourselves will go when we go through tough times. And here God says: To humble you and to test you. To know whether what is in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands. When they didn’t have food, God knew, but God had a plan already. When they didn’t have water, God knew what to do. And that’s what we should remember.

Why did God allow them to face lack? To teach them that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. This familiar verse is what Jesus quoted to Satan and it’s something we need to remember. We may read the Bible on a day-to-day basis, but somehow we have convinced ourselves that this life is all that there is. Therefore we must have all the luxury, comfort, whatever. But definitely not difficult times.

But what we need to remember is that this life which we have here, 50, 60, 70, 80 or whatever number of years, that’s all. But these are training grounds for us. God has greater plans for us. God has calibrated it. All that comes to us has been calibrated by God and sent to us. You can handle it with God’s strength, and because God has greater plans, and we know we have the benefit of knowing that this all has happened, and we have God’s word to tell us.

*v.5 Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.*

Now, all that is going through our live, God has calibrated it and sent it to us. God says: I am disciplining you as a son or a daughter. I know what I am doing. All that we need to do is cooperate with God.

## **LESSONS TO BE LEARNED**

### **1. Be convinced that God is in control.**

Never ever doubt that God has the upper hand.

### **2. God is good all the time.**

When we go through tough times, that’s the last thing we can agree with. But we need to remember that God is good all the time. Be assured of God’s love. There is no way to work on our inner negative attitudes that by drawing on God’s word. All of us that this kind of ungratefulness, bitterness. God wants us to take it out, cleanse it one by one. There is no better way than asking God’s Spirit to do it for us. God’s Spirit will do it and is doing it. The Israelites had the cloud above them and the pillar of fire before them – God’s presence. Yet every time they grumbled, they forgot about it.

Same thing is true about all of us who came to Christ, who have received Jesus as the Lord and Savior, who have God’s Spirit as a permanent resident in our life, all the time. all that we need to do in such times is to submit and ask for God’s guidance.

### 3. Spend time with God.

When you go through tough times, spend time with God, quiet times. I liked what Moses said to them: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

During the Lent period, the theme on Wednesdays was Spiritual Warfare or Armor of God. And one of the most important verses was to stand still, stand firm. I believe that's so important. When we go through tough times, first and foremost is to go to God. Spend time with God. Here are some verses I use on a daily basis to remind myself.

1 Corinthians 10:13 *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man."* And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what he can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up against this. That's why I said: Everything that comes to you, it has gone through God's hand. God's permission was granted. It was calibrated and then sent to you. That's what this verse says. No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

Which means anything that comes to your life, anything that's been allowed, you can bear it. How? He says, "When you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." We need to ask: Lord, how do I face this. And God will give you clarity. God gives wonderful insights all the time.

I'm a person with a lot of anxiety. This is my medicine every day.

Philippians 4: 6-7 *<sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Whenever you go through tough times, pray. But always remember to thank God. When the Israelites cried out, that was missing. That's why I said one of the best medicines, one of the major ways by which we need to work at our negative attitudes is to remember to thank God. Lord, the last time when I had this problem, You helped me. Thank You. I don't know how to face this problem. Help me. I think that will change your attitude.

So, whenever you pray, always remember to thank God. Don't go with that complaining, ungrateful attitude. And if you do that, the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. And always remember that God's presence is with us. that's all we need. But we need to be still. We need to have God's Spirit's guidance.

Deuteronomy 33:27

*<sup>27</sup> The eternal God is your refuge,  
and underneath are the everlasting arms.*

Most psalms start with literally telling God: Why is this happening in my life? Why? Why? Why? Psalm 55 is very interesting. The psalmist says: If I had wings, I would have flown away somewhere. But....

Psalm 55:22

*<sup>22</sup> Cast your cares on the Lord  
and He will sustain you;  
He will never let  
the righteous be shaken.*

So the solution when we go through tough times is to meditate on God's word and to sit quiet and ask God how to do it. and God will take care. God has His own way of doing it. Let me encourage you, especially in the context of VBS theme. I'm not going to tell you which verse. All that I said here is mentioned in that verse. Hebrews. It talks about perseverance. It talks about race. I believe God knows what to do with us. and may the Lord help us to trust Him when we go through tough times.

Amen.