

The Same Number of Bricks

FROM LAST WEEK:

WHAT TO KNOW: 1) God is able and willing to display his power in the skills and abilities and tools we use to do our work.

WHAT TO DO: a) Keep your focus on God the "Solver of All Your Problems" rather than on all your problems.

TODAY: It's Thanksgiving Sunday: a day to thank God for all of his goodness to us. And there is always lots to give thanks about. But *what about the details of life that we are not thankful for?* → From the continuing story of **Exiting Egypt**, **A DIFFICULT QUESTION:** *What about the parts of life that are actually worse now that you are trusting God to make them better???* (A hard question for a holiday: but a relevant one, for holidays are sometimes a really difficult time, and Thanksgiving can be especially really difficult.)

WHAT TO KNOW:

1. God's thoughts and ways and timing are not the same as ours.

This we see immediately as we cross the line from last week's to this week's text.

Exodus 4:20-21 So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand. And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. What???? Apparently, "The "Solver of All Your Problems" does not intend to be known as *The God of Quick Fixes and Immediate Improvements*. And why might that be? "The same number of bricks" under the circumstances meant slavery to Pharaoh just got much much more difficult! But it was already miserable!

2:24 They were groaning and God heard them!

Isaiah 55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. He is not thoughtless or lacking in "a way" but sometimes his ways and his thoughts are quite beyond us. Higher! As much as the heavens are higher than the earth! e.g. **Romans 9:17-18** For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

(More about this in a few Sundays to come! [October 25])

2. Therefore God sometimes makes things worse, even things we are really wanting him to make better!

This is way beyond "God not being able to prevent certain difficulties" and even way beyond "God not always able to move solutions along quite as quickly as all of us, including him, would prefer." So much beyond that it's quite possible we will find ourselves losing hope, and losing confidence in God, as did Moses!

Exodus 5:22-23 Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all."

"The same number of bricks" under the circumstances meant slavery to Pharaoh just got much much more difficult! But it was already miserable! **2:24** They were groaning and God heard them! The most significant damage done by this sort of loss of confidence is a loss of faith. (Knocking the trust out of (trust and obey.)")

WHAT TO DO:

a) **Keep on believing that God exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that **he rewards those who seek him**.

Hebrews 11:24-26 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for **he was looking to the reward**.

b) **Especially in regard to the details of life that are getting worse, let's seek the rewards of faith by praising and thanking God.**

We have been given some great examples of getting this right!

The sons of Korah

Psalm 46:1-11 God is **our refuge and strength**, a very present help in trouble. Therefore **we will not fear** though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. ... The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. **Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!** The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is **our fortress**. The exaltation of God is what every part of life in this world is about!

The famously pathetic Job

Job 13:15-16 **Though he slay me, I will hope in him;** yet I will argue my ways to his face. **This will be my salvation**, that the godless shall not come before him.

Habakkuk the Old Testament prophet

Habakkuk 3:17-19 Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, **yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength;** he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.

Paul the apostle

Philippians 1:18-21 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ **this will turn out for my deliverance this will turn out for my deliverance**, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008)

"It was granted to me to carry away from my prison years on my bent back, which nearly broke beneath its load, this essential experience: how a human being becomes evil and how good. In the intoxication of youthful successes I had felt myself to be infallible, and I was therefore cruel. In the surfeit of power I was a murderer and an oppressor.

In my most evil moments I was convinced that I was doing good, and I was well supplied with systematic arguments. It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts...

That is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me: 'Bless you, prison!' I...have served enough time there. I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation: 'Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!'"

The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1956, Vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 615-17.

We are to "strike this pose" and then to hold it indefinitely!

Hebrews 12:1-4 ... **let us run with endurance** the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin **you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.** We're not bleeding yet, are we? And even if we are, should we not keep trusting and obeying God?

c) In all the details of life, let's be very careful to keep trusting and obeying God.

Exodus 4:24-26 At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and sought to put him to death.

Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.

➔ The sooner we learn our lessons in trust and obedience, the better.

e.g. The wilderness experience could have lasted 11 days and instead lasted 40 years!

So let's be really deliberate about thanksgiving, for it is a matter of obedience! And good things begin to go on in our own minds and hearts when we manage to become thankful for the difficulties we encounter!

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

NEXT WEEK (October 18): ***“See What I Will Do”*** [Exodus 6:1-7:13]