Exodus - Commentaries by Alfred Henry Burton

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LECTURE 2. — Exod. 4:18, 5., 6.

WE closed last time with the secret of Moses' backwardness to go on the mission God called him to, and from this point we shall look at the history to-night. Here we have Moses on his mission (4:19). During the interval between this and God's appearing to him at the burning bush, Moses is being prepared for the work to which he was called.

"Israel is My son, My first-born" (4:22). What emphasis is laid in Scripture on the firstborn. He who put such affection in the heart of man for his first-born, would not be believed in this affection Himself. Now we see Him putting this people in the place of His first-born; to Pharaoh He says, "Let My son go." It is a question now of power between God and Pharaoh, not between Israel and Pharaoh — just so is it in our case. The conflict is not between us and Satan, but between God and Satan.

In the rite of circumcision, which had been neglected by Moses (4:24), we see the importance of separation. It is imperative upon those who are called out for God. Let those who have to act for God in their families take this caution. There is a caution, too, in it to those who hinder their relations and friends from a decided testimony for God: they are preparing a rod for the back of those they love, as well as bringing a rod for themselves by-and-by. Now Moses has to attend to this appointment of God before he goes forward in the work he is called to: when done God's wrath is appeased, and Moses goes on his way.

"And the Lord said to Aaron," &c. (4:27). Mark you here all necessaries for the accomplishment of God's purposes towards His people were provided for, and think you there is anything in our circumstances to-day that are not fore-known and provided for? God's foreknowledge is the sheet-anchor for the souls of His saints.

God in Christ must be learned by us, and come what will, there is sufficient. All is provided to meet the circumstances, and only when under unbelief can Satan have the advantage over us. When faith is in exercise, Satan has no power over us. Step by step God was with Moses, and step by step was he confirmed in what would happen from his mission being from God, and he had the comfort of knowing that the God of his mission was with him. The salvation of God is known by many who do not know the God of their salvation.

Now, when all is in preparation, the conflict begins (v. 1, 2). God says, "Let My people go," but Pharaoh will not let them go. Pharaoh buckles on his armor and enters into a struggle with God. We shall see in the sequel who is the stronger — Pharaoh or God. Observe, that if this battle is fought, and the victory won, redemption is accomplished. This is the gospel of our salvation; this is really what the saint may delight in. Christ on the cross wrestled with His enemies and ours, redemption was secured by the Captain of our salvation. Entering the lists, He won the victory alone, we enter into rest; He accomplished the work, we enter into the joy of it; we have to believe, and sing Hallelujah; we come in to receive His wages. They are called to keep a feast, how grateful the sound! When called out of Egypt into Canaan — out of darkness into light — it is to keep a feast unto the Lord„ Truly it is in the wilderness, and ever will be; but what a feast the gospel brings us into, "His body broken, His blood shed," &c.

Pharaoh says, "Who is the Lord? I know not the Lord." He ought to have known the Lord, the stone walls of the granaries, &c., ought to have taught him; he was responsible to have known the Lord. As it was then, so is it to-day. Now comes the trial of faith and the pressure of circumstances (v. 4-10). Consequences are the Lord's. We are bound to obey His word. God says, Put down the foot; and we must put it down, but He must keep it there.

God says, Step out; and we must step out, and not ask how to step back. He sees that — we must leave the results with Him. He calls us to learn the character of the Shepherd.

It is not that we shall not be silly sheep; we are and shall be silly sheep; but we have a wise Shepherd, there's the blessing. Not one circumstance can we be in, but God, the Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent God, has known and provided for it. We have to walk by faith, to live by faith, and we come to God's Word as a sure rock to learn what God is.

Because deliverance was so near, pressure was heavy. We have known, spiritually, corruption like rolling waves before freedom is given; we forget that with the temptation He will make a way to escape that we may be able to bear it. We get so occupied with the temptation, and forget that God is above all. There is great peace in knowing this: the power of faith so brings God into the circumstances that we see the trial secondary and God primary, and He will either remove the trial or make us happy in knowing God above all circumstances.

Many judge of God's power to them by their own circumstances. "One event happens to all." The spiritual man is discerned by the way he passes through his trouble, whether he has to do with God in it or not; by externals we can neither judge ourselves or others, but by the way externals affect us.

Pharaoh's intention in all this opposition (5:10-16) was to prejudice them against God; happily their affliction did not affect their safety, and was really for their good. We should never know God were we not brought into the path of faith; take heed where you wish for peace and quiet of circumstances instead of trial. Trial is the best thing that can happen to us. "Woe to them that sit at ease in Zion." Rather let us thank God: when we have got this one, be prepared for another, this is the place of conflict; as soon as we make head against one trouble, we have to breast another wave of sorrow; therefore buckle on your armor and be ready for the next conflict, Beware how you say, if you had not taken this or that part of obedience you had not had this or that trouble. Great knowledge of God is gained in trouble. We had never known the blessing but for God exercising the faith He has given. Satan cannot hurt when we stare him in the face — "resist the devil, and he will

flee from you.” But for the trials we deplore, we might have had worse failures to deplore.

Do you say, We do not know where we are? What! Don’t you know where you are? You are where God is, and know how strong God is when we have to lean upon Him alone. And is it nothing to be where God is? Trials are needful that Satan may be driven back. They are often sent us for this very end. “When affliction sits heavy, sin sits light,” is a trite saying but a true one. If it is suffering now, it is glory afterward; it cost the Church dear to follow Christ. Christ is a “bloody husband” in this sense to us; following Him involves daily conflict, cutting off the right hand, and this lust and that lust to be mortified; but there is a heavenly country afterward, a “city which hath foundations,” &c. Paul said, “To depart and be with Christ is far better,” but to abide was needful for the Church. He submitted in this to God’s will, he was glad to bear a little more sorrow and trial to serve Christ, he knew there would be no service for him like this in heaven. Be awake, then, to your privilege of being able to serve Christ down here. If trouble comes in like a flood, never mind; we have come to Christ, and He has overcome sin, Satan, and the world.

How little patience is in the best and meekest of men (v. 22). We cannot stand trial, nature is impatient — “why is it that Thou hast sent me” — won’t give God time; no, not a minute; flesh is never quiet; arguments are nothing in trouble, they are like the beams Samson carried away with him. Nothing but the power of the Spirit will lift you above trial. God did not take us up, any more than this people, because we were better than others, but found us by the roadside, and took us up to teach us and make us what He would have us.

Now all, as it were, cries out for God (6.); God appears upon the scene: the people were to go and Pharaoh could not hinder them. Whatever the trial by the way, the end is sure. We may pitch our tent one day here, another there; but with God in the trial, God in the scene as here, let us get honey out of the carcass of the lion and not be discouraged. There was a terrible look-out for the people in the last chapter: what a change now. “Let them go,” God had said it, they did not apprehend it. Faith had to be formed upon God’s power to work. The answer to unbelief is, “I am the Lord,” past, present, and future. “I am the Lord.” God did not deign to answer them but by His character. He silenced them with a breath of His great name. We get upon His name, and we rest. “I am the Lord,” that was what Moses and the people were to trust to. When God would encourage His people’s faith, He speaks of Himself. There are trials indeed, plenty of them, but God’s answer to unbelief in them is His own character. Christ says of God, “My Father and your Father, My God and your God.” “I am the Lord.”

There is mighty majesty in the way God speaks of Himself. When His Presence is before the soul, there is perfect repose; the sense of His everlasting love is the power of obedience. He takes for granted their murmurings, He takes no notice of them. They were not called because they were good, neither because they were bad could His purpose be hindered. And does not our God know our character and our failures? Yes, but He does not condescend to speak after their manner, but of Christ who died and rose again, and the word is to “Whosever believeth,” &c. God’s work accredited in the heart, the soul is saved; it is not by faith and good works, but faith without works counted for righteousness.

“I will bring you in,” &c. (chap 6:8). The question of redemption is never by halves. When He brings out from Egypt, He brings into Canaan. The blessings begin with, “I am the Lord.” We are in the center fenced up, the Lord before, behind, around. Not blessing because we believe it, but because He would have it so. They could not apprehend it for anguish of spirit. But God would not do it because they apprehended it, neither would His purpose be hindered because they apprehended it not.

The Lord tells you to come; the word come is sufficient warrant for any soul in this company to-night. If God has brought us in against our will, He will keep us in. Do not say you are this and that. You are welcome all the same; the Lord is come; whether you like it or whether you like it not; and when you cease to like it you must obey. You say you are all bad, you are this and you are that. Let nothing cut you out from His welcome; Christ has done this and that, and you will get it, and that is all.

The more you fall out with yourself, the better for you; the more you will keep in with Christ, the more you keep out with yourselves; and the less you think of yourself, the more you will think of Christ. God’s people fall out to the end of the chapter; but suppose all God’s people had gone wrong. God abideth the same, God is true. If we have no fellowship with saints, we have the living God. If we have to die, we shall have no saints to go with us, though we go to the communion of saints.

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