

Let us pray

Heavenly Father as we read your word this morning, open our hearts and minds and help us to apply your message to our lives today and in the future. Our priority should be to listen to you and we recognise we need your help to do this regularly so that we can play our part in the life you have called us to. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

You may have noticed that today is the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. Yes, Christmas was only a month ago, which means that there are only about 8 months to go before some shops will be reminding us it is getting close to Christmas once more, and look how quickly this month has passed! Just to depress you even more, writing about God's people being slaves in Egypt seems at first sight to be far away from all the good food I ate during Christmas and certainly being on holiday from work is far removed from the life of a slave. Well you will be pleased to hear that healthy eating and diet food are the only options for me at the moment, which is still nothing like the life of our slaves we have read about this morning! Although as we will see, the attitude of a slave may just be the correct image to have, when we are trying to seek what is best for God's people.

If you were here last week you will remember that God had chosen Moses to lead his people, but Moses did not accept the call at first. Indeed Moses put up excuse after excuse not to accept God's calling. We read in chapter 4 Moses saying to God "I have never been eloquent, I am slow of speech and tongue" which according to some members of my family also applies to me! And like me, Moses had no confidence in his own abilities and did not think the Israelites would believe him and it needed God to provide three miraculous signs for Moses to use to show the people that he had indeed a message from God. His staff, which turned into a snake, his hand, which would become leprous and finally he would take water from the Nile which would then turn to blood. And right at the end of chapter 4 he has success, the elders of Israel listen to everything the Lord has said through Moses and the people witness his signs from God.

So they knew the encounter with God was true, they believed Moses, they knew he had been chosen and most importantly they knew God had concern for them. Which sets the scene for our bible reading today. In verse 1 we read that Moses and Aaron, his brother, went to Pharaoh and said "This is what God says, Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert." We are told earlier in chapter three this would be a three day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to God. If we put ourselves in the place of the Pharaoh, what would our reaction be to the request from Moses? Notice here that Moses does not say "my people want to go off for three days", but that "God says, let my people go into the desert." Well the Pharaoh has complete contempt towards God and towards Moses, and in verse 2 we read "who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go." As we shall soon see the Pharaoh will eventually know the full powerful reality of God, but more of that from Graham next week.

Moses ensures that the Pharaoh knows that failure to obey might cause God to strike the Israelites with plagues or the sword. And Moses implies with this warning, that God should be treated with respect and his commands obeyed. And here is a question for each one of us today – Do we always treat God with respect and obey his commands? Clearly the Pharaoh did not, but let's not forget that the Israelites were slaves and they were in Egypt when it was at the height of its military power and they are being subjected to a very unreasonable Pharaoh. Indeed what happens next is not just a no from the Pharaoh, things will also get distinctly worse for the Israelites.

If being slaves was not enough, the Pharaoh makes their work harder culminating in verse 9 when he says "Make the work harder for the men." Now the task of making bricks is even harder as they are no longer provided with the straw they need, rather they have to go and fetch straw for themselves, but still produce the same quantity of finished bricks! I am certain we all know the natural human response when people are asked to work longer hours, and do extra work for no increase in pay! So we have double bad news, no three day trip and the prospect of more work and a harder life.

The same was true for Jesus. We heard in our New Testament reading that Jesus was no ordinary human being, performing miracles and being part of God's plan. A plan that would put Jesus at the people's disposal, who decided to eventually kill him, and suffer a death he did not deserve. God's view of these events is very different from that of the people responsible for Jesus' death. Jesus, throughout his life, was spending his time serving God, however, to the people around Jesus near the end of his life he had become a criminal. Imagine a life spent serving God, performing miracles, only to end it as a criminal? We see exactly this same pattern in our lives today and as Moses and the Israelites found through the Pharaoh, there are many that find fault or criticise God's people for spending time in the service of God. Pharaoh branded the Israelites lazy when they wanted to worship God for three days. And we live in a world that is very quick to condemn or criticise Christians for putting God first in our lives. So, if we are God's people, are we listening to God or to Pharaohs? Are we putting God first in our lives? Are we taking what God says seriously and obeying his commands? And do we seek what's best for God's people here

in Christ Church, in Moreton? As we look in the bible for answers to these questions, we need to focus on what Jesus said and did in his life and what that means for us today.

Firstly, are we listening to God? God chose Moses, who really did not think he was up to the job and initially lands the Israelites in more trouble and despair than they were already in. What is our response when God chooses the most unlikely of people to carry out his work? Do we talk about people behind their backs, passing comment on what a mess they are making? If I had been an Israelite, I would certainly have been guilty of that and been all too ready to join in with the loathing of Moses and Aaron that follows later in chapter 5. So we need to be listening to God, praying through our response and lowering our expectations. We are not perfect, we should expect things to get worse before they get better. I hope the same will be true of my sermons! So I need you all to persevere with me. Following Moses example, when the road was hard and got even harder, he once more turned to God, he did not give up. I have only to look at my life over the past year and the immediate future to see an extremely hard road. Many of you will know that my own father was diagnosed with cancer last year and died, I've recently been ill myself and now I have started to only work four days a week due to falling sales.

Through all our lives we need to keep listening to God. We need to be working out what our responses should be and as God's people we need to be helping those around us in need. God called Moses to help his people. God called Jesus to save his people. Is God calling you to help his people?

Secondly, are we taking God seriously? Are we obeying his commands? And do we realise that God is concerned about us? When Moses had convinced the elders and he had performed the miraculous signs before the people, they knew God was concerned about them and their plight. What was their response? They bowed down and worshipped, it is there right at the end of Chapter 4. God's plan for Jesus was to show the world the way to eternal life. God always has a plan and I guess in our community, our country, and our world, we tend to think we are fairly insignificant parts of that plan. In human terms we are tiny cogs in a big machine. From our lowly perspective, we imagine God has more important things to be doing. After all, we pray about them every week in church, for our country, the financial recession, or loss of jobs. And in our world, wars, poverty and persecution. And yet here we see God persevering with his people, who were slaves, who had lost all hope. That is exactly the type of people God wants to help. If you are feeling hopeless and overwhelmed by everything that is happening in your life, God is concerned about you. We read in Mark chapter 2 verse 17 "On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

When I start to think that maybe preaching and leading services is not for me, I remember that God is concerned about me and he always gives me a sign of encouragement. We need to be worshipping God for all he has done for us, obeying his commands, and not forgetting that he cares about each one of us.

And finally, do we seek what's best for God's people here in Christ Church? As we have heard, Moses never gave up and put his trust in God. We should be encouraged by the example Moses has set. Moses had his calling and although requiring reassurance and help from his brother, brought his people's needs before the Pharaoh. Now I know Graham is a very capable and competent leader, but he cannot fulfil everything our church needs to do on his own. As much as he would like to be, he is not a superman. We all need to play our part, however insignificant and mundane that part may be in making this place the home for God's people and the place where everyone can see and hear God at work. Look at Moses, God chose Moses and he put his trust in God and played the part required with help from others. Is that what is happening in our church? Are we playing our part in the life of this church, or do we leave it to someone else and become armchair Christians? As we have seen this morning, Moses was willing to step out and become very unpopular for the good of his people. Are we ready to step out in faith and seek what's best for God's people here in Moreton? We will not be able to step out on our own, we need help. What do you need from this church to enable you to fulfil God's purpose for your life? Is it prayer? Is it teaching? Is it a home group bible study? Is it tea, listening and company? Is it a quiet place to sit at lunch time? They are all available to us and with God's help they can and do change lives.

We look at Moses and the Israelites and the harsh slavery they were suffering at this time and we see that in our lives today, we need to be listening to God and work out how we can help God's people. We need to take God seriously, worshipping him for all he has done for us and responding with faithful obedient service. And in that service we need to be stepping out in faith and taking the example of Moses, never giving up.

Let us pray.

God our father, we do thank you for showing us the life of Moses and the Israelites in your word. Help us to recognise your voice in the busyness of our lives, so that we take your calling seriously, giving the highest priority to seeking what is best for your people. Help us to overcome our own reluctance to serve you, so that we reach that joy of knowing that you are concerned about each one of us. Give us the courage to step out in faith and to persevere with faithful and obedient service. We ask this through his most precious name. Amen