

FAITH GROWS WHEN GOD ACTS

Sixth in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Living By Faith* from Exodus 7:1-20
“The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.” Exodus 7:5

The other evening Barb and I watched a TV program about Judy Garland. Judy rocketed to stardom at sixteen when she was cast as Dorothy in the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. The fact that it was 67 years ago and every adult and child here this morning can sing the first line of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, is testimony to how great she was. Judy went on to star in numerous hit musicals for MGM over the next decade. Fred Astaire came out of retirement just for the privilege of working with her in *Easter Parade*. But inside, Judy Garland was a broken person. She coped with her pressures and insecurities by pills and drugs, but even they could not enable her to surmount the demands of movie-making or her marriages. In the early 1960s CBS put Judy in her own variety show on Sunday evenings. I said to Barb, “I don’t remember that!” The reason was soon apparent. I, like everybody else in America, was watching *Bonanza*.

In the 1970s Judy returned to her first love, singing in the great music halls before a live audience. But the hours before she was to perform were pure agony. She’d stand in the wings, insecure and afraid, not sure she had the courage to go on. The orchestra conductor learned to wait until he saw her behind the curtain, before swinging into the overture. Then the announcer cried, “Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Miss Judy Garland!” And the house would erupt into frenzied applause. It was only then that Judy, hearing that thunderous approval, found the courage to step onstage. In that moment everything changed. Her voice belted out the songs. The entertainer in her took over, and together she and the audience soared to the heights. It was the applause, you see, that catapulted Judy Garland into another world. If you are searching for faith or struggling with confidence, applause may be essential for you too, but not in the way you may think.

We’ve been talking for several weeks about living by faith. Last week in the book of Exodus we watched as Israel, enslaved in Egypt, faltered at the first impediment thrown in the way of their liberation and departure for the promised land. Moses had gone to Pharaoh to demand their release. Pharaoh said, no. Then he made their lives doubly hard with more work. The Israelites tumbled into doubt and discouragement, not even mounting a fight. They took their despair out on Moses and blamed him for their troubles. Moses was infected with their pessimism, but he at least took the problems to God. In Exodus 6:6-8 God said in effect, “Don’t worry.” Then in verse 7 he renewed his promise and reassured Moses. “I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

Do you struggle with obstacles in your life? We all do. In such times we should review God’s promises by turning to the Bible. It’s full of them. God assures us he’ll lead us and will help us and will provide for our needs. Often we experience his peace when we refocus on him. We saw all of this last week. But when you and I are facing

problems, it's usually not quite as simple as that. You can't just throw a switch and turn faith on. So today in Exodus 6 and 7 I want you to learn two more things about faith. **1. Faith calls for obedience**, and **2. Faith grows bold when unbelievers believe**.

1. Faith calls for obedience. After his conference with God, Moses took heart. Chapter 6, verse 9 says, "*So Moses spoke to the sons of Israel.*" He told them what God had said. I think he expected that they would shake off their doubt, summon their courage, and press on to confront Pharaoh. They didn't. Verse 9 goes on, "*They did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and their cruel bondage.*" We find here two reasons why living by faith is so hard for us. The first lies in this word *despondency*. Literally it means *shortness of spirit*. Our first thought may be to interpret shortness of spirit in terms of stature. When I was in the seventh grade a local supermarket called *Food Giant* held a grand opening celebration. Word was that they had invited a man for the celebration who stood eight foot four, so I rode my bicycle out to see for myself. Sure enough, the *Food Giant* had a real giant. I walked up to him, stared straight at his belt buckle, and shook his hand. My whole arm disappeared in his grip. I thought about playing basketball against him. I felt a shortness of spirit!

But that's not what this phrase means. Think instead, *shortness of breath*, for that is literally what *shortness of spirit* means. If you have shortness of breath you have a hard time getting enough oxygen. You're physically weak. You have to stop and rest. Israel had shortness of breath. Pharaoh had taken their breath away. They had no energy, no strength for the challenge ahead. I spoke with someone the other day who is going through serious problems. He said, "I just don't have the strength to keep going."

The second reason for lack of faith comes from this phrase, *cruel bondage*. The Israelites were literally enslaved by the Egyptians, and part of slavery is that someone else is calling the shots. If you slow down, the whip cracks. If you turn to the right or left, the chain jerks you back to center. There are a lot of things that make us feel enslaved. Lack of money can enslave you to the creditor. Illness can limit your ability to do what you want. You may feel enslaved by marriage to a self-centered spouse. Certainly sin can enslave us. You may be driven by appetites or behaviors you are not able to control. When you are in bondage, faith is awfully hard to summon up. Slaves don't have faith. They simply do what they are made to do. The result of all this for Israel was that the people didn't listen when Moses tried to tell them what God had said.

It could have ended there. But it didn't. See what God did next. In verse 11 he stopped trying to rouse them by means of promises and encouragements. Instead he issued a command. God said to Moses, "*Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land.*" There was no room to argue there. There was simply an order to be obeyed. Do you recall how in the original third *Star Wars* movie Yoda is teaching Luke how to use the Force, and Luke is discouraged. Yoda tells him to raise his space ship out of the muck. Luke says, "*I'll try, Master Yoda.*" Yoda says, "*There is no try. There is only do or not do.*" That's where Moses is here. But look how deeply his insecurity has sapped him. In verse 12 he says to God, "If the people of Israel won't listen to me, how am I going to get Pharaoh to listen to me. You know I'm a failure as a

public speaker.” How many excuses do we offer God for why we can’t do something? Look what follows in verse 13. *“Then the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt.”* Do you know what a charge is? Don’t think of a *cattle prod*. A charge is a command. God is saying, “Listen! It doesn’t matter what you feel or don’t feel. Get going and do it!” In John 14:21, Jesus said to his disciples, *“He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me.”* You and I say we love Jesus. And yet we have so many reasons why we can’t do what he wants us to do. Jesus says, “There aren’t any excuses. Do what I tell you.”

Of course, you know and so does God, that none of us does what God commands in any way approaching perfection. That’s why we must be saved by grace, as a gift of God. Jesus went to the cross to pay for our failures to obey God’s commandments, He died so by faith in him his perfect record of obedience could be transferred to our account, so we could be perfectly acceptable to God. But that doesn’t let us off the hook. If we are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus, that ought to cause us to love him. And if we love him, we will want to obey him. We’ll want to please him. So faith in Christ leads to salvation, and salvation leads us to obedience. It doesn’t matter what we feel or don’t feel. If we love Christ we will do what he says, regardless. This is what we learn from Exodus 6. OK, but that still leaves us with the problem of how we get up and in obedience to God, confront the Pharaohs in our lives. Here is where applause comes in.

2. Faith grows bold when unbelievers believe. Turn to Exodus 7. At the beginning of chapter 7 God states the command once again We need to hear God’s commands over and over, don’t we, because we don’t listen to God very well. Especially when we are wracked by doubt and discouragement. So Moses is to go to Pharaoh. In verse 3 however, God tells Moses in advance what the result of his obedience will be. *“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart.”* In other words God is saying, Moses, you go and tell Pharaoh to let my people go, but I’ll tell you: He isn’t going to do it.” There is something important to see here. God tells us to obey him. He doesn’t promise that we will be successful in what he’s sent us to do. But that doesn’t change the fact that we are still to obey. God doesn’t promise that your marriage will be happy if you obey him. He doesn’t tell us that we will overcome our problems at work if we obey him. Often we do find success at the end of the road of obedience. But many times we don’t. The issue is whether we will do what he tells us. As a church, God doesn’t tell us we will be successful in the things we attempt for him. But that doesn’t mean that we don’t have to do those things. We’re not the boss. He is!

There is another thing to note in verse 3. This phrase about hardening a person’s heart does not mean that God causes a person to sin. It simply means that God allows a person to follow his natural rebellion. The unbeliever carries a tendency to resist God. In pharaoh’s case, God’s not going to interfere. His heart will harden and he will do what he wants to do. It’s the exact opposite for the Christian. When we become a Christian God places his Holy Spirit in our hearts and gives us an inclination to love God and to want to do those things that will please him. What concerns us now is how we clear the

impediments out of the way so that our God-given tendency to love and obey him takes over our hearts and bold faith is released.

One of the ways God uncovers our faith so that we trust him and obey him, is revealed in verse 5. *“The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.”* Compare this to chapter 6, verse 7. We read it earlier. God says to Israel, *“I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”* There is a sequence here. First, the Egyptians will come to know that God is God when he pries their fingers off the Israelites and they no longer control God’s people. Then, second, Israel will know God is God when they are free and on their way out of Egypt. The Egyptians are going to realize who God is first and then Israel’s lack of faith will give way to bold confidence in him. To state it in different words, when unbelievers believe, then God’s people will believe. Isn’t that amazing? You’d think it would be the other way, that God’s people believe and then unbelievers believe. In some sense that is true. But in this case it is not until God has brought unbelievers to faith that his people really believe that he is God.

Look how this plays out. In chapter 7, verse 9 Moses goes to Pharaoh and throws his staff down on the floor and it turns into a serpent. Pharaoh counters by calling for his magicians, and they throw their staffs down and they turn into snakes. (v 11-12) But then Moses’ serpent gobbles up the magicians’ snakes. Pharaoh still refuses to let the people go. “OK,” God says to Moses, “Go down to the Nile and strike the water with your staff and it will turn to blood.” (v 15-16) Then in verse 17 God says to Pharaoh, *“Thus you shall know that I am the Lord.”* God will act and pharaoh will start to believe God is really God.. So Moses and Aaron march down to the river. They strike the Nile and the water turns blood red. Nine more plagues followed: frogs and gnats and insects and cattle dying and boils and hail and locusts and darkness and finally the death of every firstborn son in Egypt. Finally the Egyptians are brought to their knees. That’s when they admit that God is indeed God, and let the Israelites go. The amazing thing is that many Egyptians were so convinced that they joined the Israelites in the Exodus. Hundreds of thousands of them followed Israel out of Egypt. It was at this point that Israel themselves finally believed and knew that God was really God.

Here’s the application we may draw from this account. There are tens of thousands of people moving into the area north of I-26. Many, perhaps most, do not know God. But they’re starting to know him. At our Dutch Fork campus over the last two years over 25 men and women have come to trust Jesus Christ as their savior and Lord. Cornerstone members have led them to faith, and they’ve become members of our church. More came to faith in Christ this past week. This is just the beginning. The movement has started. People whose lives and the lives of their children will be changed forever. At our Bush River campus we are in touch with thousands of others who don’t know God is God. We’ve been seeing them come to Christ for years now. The point is that those who don’t believe are starting to believe. What should that do to us? It ought to bring us to a new conviction that God is God. It ought to make our faith bold. Today we vote on purchasing land. It is an act of faith. I hope it is a bold act of faith propelling

us forward in obedience to do what he has called us to do. God hasn't told us how much success we will have. That's God's concern, not ours. He just calls us to follow his leading Every time you and I see a person come to faith in Christ it should strengthen our faith. Can you hear the beginning of the applause? It is applause that comes from those who are applauding not us, but God, because they have come to know that he indeed is God? As you stand behind the curtain, listen. I tell you it is starting. Step out now and join the new believers and sing! "Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee. How great Thou art, how great Thou art!"

Preached by Dr. Rick Perrin on September 10, 2006 at Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, 5637 Bush River Road, Columbia SC 29212 Tel. 803-772-1000 www.DiscoverCornerstone.com Copyright 2006