

Exodus 5-6 - The Path to Liberty

By
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“Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”
-Exodus 5:1

As we have spoken about before, the largest theme of the book of Exodus is liberty itself. This phrase from Exodus 5:1 is probably the most famous phrase in the entire book, and one of the most famous phrases in all of literature, *“Let My people go...”* It is famous not only because of its place in the overall narrative of this book, but most importantly, because of how liberty and oppression are universal themes that every person has to wrestle with. Even if we won't struggle with the kind of slavish tyranny that the Israelites had to deal with, every single person will have to deal with oppression in one form or another. This oppression could be from an external source, like a boss, a parent, a government, or even a spouse, but for all of us, we will experience multiple tyrannies within our own soul.

It is this internal tyranny that Christ came to set us free from, and the cost of that liberty was paid through His cross, if we have the courage to actually walk in the liberty that Christ has purchased for us. And so in this study, we will look at the response of Pharaoh and God's response to Pharaoh in order to understand the nature of tyranny and the path to true liberty.

Tyranny of the Soul

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” They answered Him, “We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free’?” Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. “And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”
-John 8:31-36

In order for this story to have maximum impact on our lives though, we first must wrestle with a profound, yet surprising, teaching of the Bible, all of us are bound up in tyranny.

The reason why Exodus is the center of the Old Testament, and the reason why Christ was crucified specifically during the feast of Passover, the feast that celebrated the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, is because of this universal truth. However, as we can see from the above passage, this truth is one that is not usually met with ready acceptance or understanding.

While we might be able to see external tyrannies and oppose them, whether those are corrupt institutions or abusive relationships, recognizing the truth of Jesus' statements is much more difficult. According to Him, even if social institutions or relationships might be oppressive, the true oppression occurs at the individual level and happens within our souls. That means that the individuals who oppress others are themselves oppressed.

*"But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."
-2 Timothy 3:13*

The strange evidence that Christ gives His listeners is the universality of sin. For the Christian, sin is not merely a moral term, as many use it today, but instead it was a very complex term that referred to the nuanced concept of missing the mark. In other words, Jesus' evidence that we are enslaved is that we are incapable of actually living up to our personal desires and goals. The apostle Paul writes about this phenomenon in Romans 7:

*"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for the will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice."
-Romans 7:18-19*

This is again a universal experience. In our modern culture we think that all our problems can be solved through education, that if only people knew the right thing to do they would do it and so we create programs to "educate" wayward youth. But according to Paul, the problem for us is not so much ignorance, meaning that we don't know what the right or wrong thing is, but it is a problem of the will. Even though we know that we should say, tell the truth, be courageous, remain faithful, and so on, we often find in ourselves an inability to do what we want.

As a small example, take the fact that 95 percent of people who diet will gain all their weight back within 2 years of beginning their diet. We see a similar percentage in New Year's Resolution where around 92 percent of people who make New Year's resolutions won't stick to what they resolved to do. They too can speak like Paul "...to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find."

The Power of Tyranny

This is what the slavery of the Israelites is meant to represent to us. Slavery is a situation in which you are not free to do what you want. When your will is captured by someone who is stronger than you to do their will in the place of your own. This is what has happened to the children of Israel, their will has been taken by the Egyptians in order to fulfill the Egyptian desire at the cost of their own interests. This is so pervasive that the people of Israel begin to actually side with the tyrant against their own liberators:

“And the officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble after it was said, “You shall not reduce any bricks from your daily quota.” Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them. And they said to them, “Let the LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.” So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me?”

-Exodus 5:19-22

Notice that we see Israelites who are working for the Egyptians to more efficiently oppress their fellow Jews. This is unfortunately also a universal phenomenon. In the slave holding American south, oftentimes brutal slaveholders would get house slaves to punish and rat out their fellow slaves. In the Holocaust, the Nazi's appointed Jewish “kapos” for the same function. And even during Jesus' time, there were the hated tax collectors who were Jews doing the dirty work of the Roman oppressors.

As we have talked about in a previous study, Satan is not content to simply do the dirty work himself, and this is not due to laziness or inability, but because his desire to destroy is so pervasive that it is actually more terrible to use his victims to victimize other people. This is why the Pharaoh uses the midwives and the parents to drown the infant Hebrew boys in Exodus 1, why Pharaoh is using Jewish slaves as the taskmaster for other Jews, and why in vampire stories the vampire turns his victims into his accomplices. The pervasiveness of evil is not merely to hurt or tyrannize someone else, but the fullest victory of the devil is to corrupt what is good, while the fullest victory of God is to redeem what has been corrupted.

Another powerful idea present here is the cost of righteousness. As we talked about last week, the cost of powerful transformation for the benefit of the spirit is the flesh. In order for us to truly repent of our sinful behavior and grow our spirit in Christ, we have to be willing to suffer in the flesh. But the opposite is true. These Jewish collaborators with the Egyptians show that the temptation of Satan is to sacrifice the spirit for the

preservation, and prosperity of the flesh. And so, in order to follow the call of Christ, one must die to themselves and sacrifice their flesh, in order to follow the corruption of Satan, one must sacrifice the spirit in order to indulge the desires of the flesh.

Tyranny is so powerful and oppressive that many people will oftentimes take the path of least resistance, and instead of opposing the tyrant, they make a pact with them in order to lessen their own suffering. We can see this same phenomenon at the individual level as well. Many abuse victims will find themselves siding with their abuser. We call this phenomenon “Stockholm, or Helsinki Syndrome” due to this disorder being identified during a rash of hostage situations in Sweden and Finland during the 1970s. But this recognizable event is when a hostage finds themselves associating themselves with their captor. At a smaller scale we see this same thing happen in abusive relationships.

Oftentimes a woman who is being abused by a man will find themselves fighting to stay in the relationship and even defending their abuser to other people. The same can be seen in abused children who will even lie to concerned adults about their home situation in order to protect their abusive parent. They will even find themselves adjusting their behavior to keep the abuser “calm” and blame themselves for their own abuse.

However, this strange phenomenon is present within each individual. Remember that the Egyptians in this story represent the passions of the flesh and the Israelites represent the desires of the spirit.

“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”

Galatians 5:17

The passions of the flesh lust against the higher desires of the spirit, as such, we are prevented from pursuing our higher goals by the lower passions of the flesh. Paul gives a brief description of these two warring desires as the chapter goes along, but for the sake of this paper, I will only mention the “fruit of the Spirit”, or to put it another way, our spiritual desires:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

-Galatians 5:22-23

So let’s use a couple different examples to explain this point. Let’s say that I am pursuing bodily health. This is actually a spiritual desire that falls under the category of “self-control”. However, my spiritual desire to be self-controlled will be at war with my

desire for immediate gratification of my bodily appetites. So while my spirit desires to exercise self-control, my flesh craves various sweets that compromise my goals. And ultimately if I fail in my spiritual pursuit, it isn't that I lacked the will or the knowledge of what to do, it is because I am in bondage to my flesh.

Or to take another example. Let's say I desire to have "peace" or harmony within my relationships. Even though this is a good spiritual desire, what is at war with that desire are the various passions of the flesh that create division and conflict between me and my fellow man. Within that list might be anger, selfishness, an unwillingness to be corrected, jealousy, and so on. While there are a myriad of examples that I could give, I think that the point is clear. Whenever we find within ourselves an inability to accomplish the higher spiritual goals that we have, it is evidence of this internal tyranny that Christ warns us about.

The Response of Tyranny

"And Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go." So they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days' journey into the desert and sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." Then the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor." And Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!" So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, "You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves."

Exodus 5:2-7

But what happens when someone finally grows tired of tyranny and demands escape, we see the result above, things get worse not better. While there is much to say about this symbolically, I wanted to spend a little time explaining the behavior of Pharaoh. When confronted with the reality of his sin Pharaoh doesn't repent, he doubles down on his bad behavior. First he denies God's authority by saying "I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go." In ancient Egypt Pharaoh was seen to be the earthly avatar of one of the chief gods of Egypt, usually the sun god Ra.

As such, Pharaoh can't conceive of another deity that he should submit himself to. As stated before, the ones who oppress others are themselves oppressed. We see in this story that Pharaoh himself is oppressed by the tyranny of his own pride. Since he can't conceive of an authority higher than himself, Pharaoh has made a god out of his own feelings, meaning that whatever he feels is right gains moral credibility in his eyes.

Therefore, since he sees no reason to let the people of Israel go, he takes this feeling as a solid fact that he can base his decisions on. As the story goes on, we see this pride become worse and worse. Even when Egypt is ravaged by the plagues, and even when his own advisors are begging for him to release the Israelites, his pride won't allow him to recognize reality. He would literally rather die than admit to making a mistake and is driven by his own arrogance to his death, though we don't know if he literally drowned with his army in the Red Sea, his reign was destroyed by his foolishness and brought his nation to ruin.

It is this folly that God is exposing in these chapters. It seems odd to us that God doesn't immediately demand the full release of His people and demonstrate the highest possible miracle in order to show His power. In this first meeting, Aaron and Moses simply ask to take the people of Israel into the wilderness to sacrifice and they show no miracles. This seems odd to us because we know that God wants to completely deliver His people from Egypt, not simply give them a week off to worship Him, and it is also strange that Moses and Aaron don't reveal the power of God in the first meeting.

The reason is that God is testing Pharaoh, and by doing so He is revealing the true need for Israel to have to escape. Many of the Israelites are still only wanting a reform of Egypt, they simply want to go back to the way things were under Joseph. However, God is using these more gentle requests to show just how tyrannical Pharaoh is. He sees the lack of power from Moses and Aaron as weakness and he exploits that perceived weakness by torturing the people. The tyrant won't budge even an inch, he is set in his ways because that is all he knows.

Secondly, Pharaoh doubles down by oppressing the people of Israel further. When someone has given themselves over to a vice, they become more and more degraded in their abilities and can only appeal to what they know. Pharaoh is a weak leader who can only motivate his people through fear and intimidation. As such, when his authority is challenged by God his response is to crack down on the Israelites even more in order to force obedience.

Like a child throwing a temper tantrum, he has lost control of himself and instead of seeking self-control he seeks to control others through his wrath. The problem is, since Pharaoh has so much power, this strategy has proven successful in the past. He is usually able to bully others into doing what he wants since he is, arguably, the most powerful monarch alive at the moment. Because of this, he can't conceptualize that his efforts would be thwarted by these two random prophets who approach him out of nowhere in the name of a God that he has never heard of.

The interesting thing though is that his strategy almost works. The people of Israel are so engrained in a slave mentality that they will do almost anything to appease the displeasure of Pharaoh, including turning on their fellow Jews and denying the deliverance of God. This is how tyranny is allowed to continue. Instead of opposing the tyrant, we try to make peace with them, we try everything in our power to make the tyrant like us even though we are sacrificing our honor to do so.

This truth can help us understand a strange symbol in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 17 the apostle John is shown an image of a whore riding upon the beast, which represents the brutal system of the antichrist. While this symbol has much to teach us, for the sake of this paper I just want to point out that this image might possibly represent the complicity of good people with the system of the Beast. A prostitute is someone who will sell their honor for gain. A group of people who are willing to compromise their values in order to avoid the wrath of the tyrant fit this symbol, they have "prostituted" their values to save their lives. Which means that the actual source of slavery in the Israelites is not the Egyptians, but their own cowardice.

This is not to say that everyone in an oppressive relationship is to blame for their abuse, nor is it to excuse the abusive behavior of others. But it is to show that a tyrant only has power over those who willingly participate. This is what Christ shows us during His passion. Though He is put on trial by tyrants, He never bows to their demands, nor does He sacrifice His honor to protect His life. Even when Pontius Pilate tries to threaten Jesus into defending Himself we are told:

"But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled."

-Mark 15:5

Jesus could not be controlled or coerced into doing anything He deemed inappropriate. In a mysterious way, the One who was on trial was actually judging those who were trying to execute Him and was revealing that He was the only free person in that entire situation. These men with power thought that they were in control, but really they were enslaved to the will of their own vanity and the will of the mob. Take this interaction between Christ and Pilate:

"Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

-John 18:33-34

Pilate was not in control, he was being controlled by the mob. Just as the Jews who had sold out their brethren in order to get a more cushy position in their slavery were still fulfilling the will of their oppressors and just as Pharaoh, believing himself to be in charge is shown to be ruled and governed by his own pride and vanity.

Freedom and Responsibility

“Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”

-Exodus 5:1

However, there is also something contained in this initial request that will greatly help us understand this account. Although ultimately God wants to bring His people into the Promised Land, they do actually stop at Mount Sinai to sacrifice to God and enter into a covenant with Him. This is a complex idea that we need to understand if we want to be free. Since the sources of tyranny are innumerable and descend from our own desires, we can never set ourselves free. Even if we try to set ourselves free, we might be simply trading one form of tyranny for another. To take one example, this is what C.S. Lewis says about how pride can actually be used to defeat other vices:

“Pride can often be used to beat down the simpler vices. Teachers, in fact, often appeal to a boy's Pride, or, as they call it, his self-respect, to make him behave decently: many a man has overcome cowardice, or lust, or ill-temper by learning to think that they are beneath his dignity — that is, by Pride. The devil laughs. He is perfectly content to see you becoming chaste and brave and self-controlled provided, all the time, he is setting up in you the Dictatorship of Pride — just as he would be quite content to see your chilblains cured if he was allowed, in return, to give you cancer. For Pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense.”

-C.S. Lewis - “Mere Christianity”

While someone can actually defeat lesser sins with their pride, they haven't been set free, they have merely traded oppressors. In the same way, even after the Israelites escape Egypt they fluctuate between yearning to go back to Egypt, idol worship, and devolving into mob rule. Freedom doesn't come from throwing off all means of control, it only comes by submitting ourselves to the proper authority. The fact of the matter is that we were created by God to serve Him, this is one way to understand the idea that we are made in His image and likeness. Just as a painting of a man “lives” to “serve” his image, one who bears the image of God would have to live in order to serve God.

And if we won't submit ourselves to our ultimate authority, we will only be caught up in the service of some lesser thing. Although he was not a Christian, the author David Foster Wallace expressed this point fairly well at a commencement speech that he gave a few months before he took his own life:

"...Here's something else that's weird but true: in the day-to day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship—be it JC or Allah, be it YAHWEH or the Wiccan Mother Goddess, or the Four Noble Truths, or some inviolable set of ethical principles—is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you...Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out."

-David Foster Wallace

This is how life works, we don't have a choice as to *whether* we will serve, we only get a choice in *what* we serve. By calling His people out to the wilderness to sacrifice to Him, God is teaching us the beginning steps towards liberty. We have to make the decision to not live for ourselves anymore, but instead to live to serve God. I remember when I first started trying to fight the sin of lust and pornography in my life, I went through a Bible study called "Setting Captives Free". The first lesson in that study was all about my motivations for getting free. In this study I was asked to list out my reasons for fighting my particular sin.

In my answer I talked about my fears of being exposed, my desire to have a healthy marriage one day, and a few other motives. While none of these motives were wrong, what was exposed to me was how self-serving they were. I wasn't interested in honoring God, and I wasn't sorry for sinning against God, I was only concerned with consequences for my behavior and finding freedom in order to please my own self-interests. Even if I would have "beaten" my sin with that mentality, I wouldn't have been set free, I would only be in bondage to some new idol. The strange truth that we see in the Bible, is that freedom, here represented by "feasting" or celebrating with God, begins with surrendering our will to God. I like how the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous puts this point:

“THIS IS THE HOW and why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn’t work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life; God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most Good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom.

-”The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous”

This same principle is laid out by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Roman church:

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?”

-Romans 6:15-16

This is again the great mystery of our faith. We find our lives by losing them, we find freedom through surrender, and we find life through dying to ourselves. Our repentance is not merely a turn from our sin, in order for it to take full effect, it must be a full turn towards God.

The Beauty of Patience

“For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.”

-Exodus 5:23

However, when we look at Moses and the Israelites, what I have said above seems to not be true. Even though Moses has surrendered himself to God, he is in his faith and is finding failure in his attempts. But here is something that is sad but true, when you stand up to the tyrant expect resistance. Moses was probably hoping that Pharaoh would immediately accede to his desires, but instead resistance increased. When an individual begins to fight their sin, they find that their passions increase, not decrease.

This can be discouraging. Here we are trying to do the right thing and honor God. We are praying to God for victory, and yet, like Moses, we find immediate defeat as opposed to victory. Why is that? Because, while God is trying to set us free from our passions, He is also trying to grow us in our virtues.

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

-James 1:2-4

James tells us that when we experience resistance, and even temptation, we should not be discouraged by this, but encouraged because in the testing of our faith we can grow in patience. In this context, patience is the ability to persevere in our resolve regardless of obstacles and difficulties. James tells us that this virtue is so important, that if we let it “have its perfect work...” we will be “perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” Once again, God desires to give His people freedom, but He wants that freedom to last, in order to do this, He must build up their patience.

Notice how quickly the people of God, including Moses, go from worship to revolution. Even Moses’ wording proves the impatience he has in his spirit. “For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name...” This phrase makes it sound like he has been trying diligently for a long time, but the reality is that this was the first time he ever spoke with Pharaoh and he is ready to throw in the towel after just one rejection.

When the prospect of freedom is held out to them, they are excited, but the second things get tough, they are back to appeasing their Egyptian masters. This is how many people deal with their own passions. They stand up to them for a time, but when things get tough, they go right back to appeasing their flesh in order to deal with their cravings.

We have even ritualized these practices of “appeasement”. Think about Halloween as an example. Children, historically dressing as demons and ghouls, ask for candy in order to be sent away, otherwise they will play a “trick” on us. So we appease our demons in order to maintain “peace”. Or how about bachelor and bachelorette parties. The idea is that the person of honor at this party is surrendering their sexual desires to participate in a loving, committed relationship, but they celebrate this by ritually indulging their sexual passions.

But God doesn’t want this for His people. He doesn’t want an illusion of peace, He wants real peace. As a result, He encourages His people to stand firm against the tyrant, and for Moses to have the courage to stand up to Pharaoh, not just once or twice, but over and over again. This is the only way that repentance will take root. It isn’t just about opposing our flesh once or twice, but making a habit of resistance that in turn changes our character.

Most people today, like Moses before them, are wanting a magical, instantaneous solution to all their problems. They don't want to discipline their bodies, they want a pill that curbs their appetite, and we don't want to learn the daily discipline to fight our flesh, we simply want God to remove all obstacles from our path and make righteousness easy. We even falsely believe that if we have the right "experience" we can all of a sudden change completely and never look back. Remember, Moses has had one of the most amazing experiences with God in human history and he is already back to doubting after one rejection. Experiences are great, but they are merely the seed that can produce the real fruit of the Christian life. Without patience, this is not possible. The message of the cross is that righteousness is anything but easy:

"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God."

-1 Peter 4:1-2

Just as the cross was a long, drawn out death, so Peter tells us the death of our flesh will be equally long and drawn out. And unless we learn the virtue of patience and self-control, no spiritual experience, no matter how radical, will produce in us the righteousness that we desire.

"For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

-2 Corinthians 7:11

Hope

"I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. "And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. "Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 'I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 'And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the LORD.' " So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the children of Israel go out of his land." And Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, "The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?" Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt."

-Exodus 6:4-13

But in order to grow in our patience, we must also grow in the virtue of hope. Hope, as a virtue, is the ability to joyously anticipate a coming reward. This virtue, though it seems minor, is one of the most important things that God can do for us. For the reward of the Christian is always in the future and not in the present.

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life."

-Proverbs 13:12

The reason why hope can make our hearts sick, is because it is "deferred" or even denied in our earthly circumstances. But the wisdom of this Proverb is that our hopes are fulfilled in the image of the tree of life. The tree of life is seen in the Garden of Eden as well as the New Jerusalem that John is shown in the book of Revelation. It is a symbol of everlasting life that is found in the presence of God.

What this means is that our ultimate desire, our ultimate hope is always coming, and never truly here. The Christian who is exercising this virtue correctly is the one who can keep alive in themselves the hope of eternal life in the midst of this world of death and disappointment. It isn't that we won't experience wondrous things on this earth, but even these, if they become our ultimate hope, will disappoint us. The only one who can stave off the bitterness of disappointment without becoming jaded and cynical, is the one who can keep their hope alive in heaven itself.

In order to help Moses do this, God helps him see the past and the future. First God reminds Moses of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In other words, He is calling Moses to remember His past faithfulness to others that lived in dire circumstances. This is also why this chapter ends with a genealogy. It might seem out of place, but this is what God is doing, reminding His people of those who came before and the legacy that they are carrying on. If we want to keep hope alive in our souls, we must remind ourselves of God's past faithfulness. Without this memory, it is easy to lose faith and to lose heart.

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”

-Galatians 6:7-9

Next, He reminds Moses of His promises. It is important for me to point out that the specific promises found in Exodus 6:6-7 are the basis for the four cups during the Passover meal. In these verses God declares:

“Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. ‘I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.’”

-Exodus 6:6-7

These four promises, “I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians...”, “I will rescue you...”, “I will redeem you...”, and “I will take you as My people...” are represented in four cups of wine drunk during the Passover meal. The first, “I will bring you out...” is represented by the “cup of sanctification”. This cup represents the truth that God has promised a special relationship with His people in which He will deliver them from false gods and oppressive tyrannies. The second promise “I will rescue you...” is represented by the “cup of plagues”. Before Jews drink of this cup they remove ten drops of wine to represent the ten plagues of Egypt. This is to signify that the cost of their freedom was the suffering of their oppressors, but since God’s people should not rejoice in the suffering of others, even the wicked, the drops representing the plagues is removed, remembering the provision of God, but not reveling in the consequences to their captors.

The third promise is “I will redeem you...” This is represented by the “cup of redemption”. This cup means that God has not only brought the children of Israel out of bondage, but He has forgiven them for their own sins and transgressions. When the Israelites sacrificed the lamb before the final plague, this was to appease the wrath of God that was upon them. It is believed to be this cup, the cup of redemption, that Christ set apart during the Last Supper:

“Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”

-Luke 22:20

Like the Israelites before us, we need to be redeemed, but not with the blood of a lamb, but the perfect blood of the Son of God, shed on our behalf. Finally God promises that He will “take you as My people...” This cup is called the “cup of praise”. As you can see in these cups, they are all things that we have now, but are going to be fulfilled in the future.

Yes, God has already sanctified us, delivered us, and redeemed us, and we do praise Him for it. But while we are fully redeemed, we are not fully sanctified or delivered, and as such, we can not praise God as fully as we like. We are still bound up by sin and the concerns of this world. But God is delivering us, God is sanctifying us. And so the Christian is the one who fights their sin fearlessly, not only for what God has already done, but what He is yet to do. This hope gives us the courage necessary to keep fighting even when we feel weary and defeated. It is with this hope that Moses is able to confront Pharaoh again, and through his constant effort, he becomes the kind of courageous and faithful leader that He had called him to be.

“He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.”

-Isaiah 40:29-31