

No One Else Matters (Part One)

The "Faulty" Leadership of Moses
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If you would please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 118. These are actually the scriptures I left off with in my last sermon. I decided I would start off this sermon with the same ones because it has a kind of similar theme.

Psalm 118:8-9 It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

Psalm 146:3-5 Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.

These two are parallel passages. And as I mentioned, I used, especially chapter 146, to end my previous sermon about our response to the current near quarantine condition because I wanted to leave you with the thought that now is the time to exercise faith, and the faith that we exercise needs to be squarely based on our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, not by any means on men, and especially not on the confused, limited, very foolish people who are rulers and leaders in this world today.

I want to develop this thought a bit more today and blend it into the lessons and principles of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. I want to be able to give you meat in due season. So I figured that this was a good lesson to pull out from the Scriptures. Keeping our eyes fixed on our Savior, our High Priest, the Head of the church, and our soon-coming King, may turn out to be a major challenge going forward, depending on how this crisis turns out. I hope it does not fundamentally change the United States of America, but we do not know. It is not over yet. We are still in the midst of it, and certainly as the great tribulation draws near, it is going to be harder to focus on God and upon Jesus Christ, because there will be so many distractions going on in the world that we have to worry about—or not. If we keep our minds focused on God, maybe we will not worry about them quite so much.

This time of contagion can be a mind altering experience. As mentioned in my commentary a couple days ago, sociologists are already theorizing about how this near universal quarantine will influence and even alter significantly the trajectories of our young people. If it goes on any longer, it is going to make a marked impression on them. These sociologists say it may rewrite normality for them and change their mentality. Change even some of their behaviors. They may all become germophobes and not touch each other. And that is significant. A whole generation that has an abhorrence of touch. Just think about it. How would that change things? And if it happens to them, just depending on how deeply it affects them, it could change the culture, maybe in small ways, maybe in large ways. They do not know yet.

These sociologists are just theorizing about how it could change people, but the longer it goes on, the more it will alter them and therefore ultimately alter society. But we do not know, we are not there yet. But we are going through something that may have a profound effect on the way people think, the way they act, the way they perceive other people.

Now this experience will have an effect, whatever it happens to be, on Christians and on the church. But we want those effects to be positive and faith building, and there is a way we could perceive them that will do that rather than affect us negatively, like the sociologists are thinking will happen with this young generation. We want this time of contagion to bring us closer to God, to bring us closer to each other, even though we are having to practice social distancing. It is kind of ironic, but we can make it happen; that being away can draw us closer together. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, right?

Now, even as those things are our desired goal, that is, coming out of this with a positive faith built that has brought us closer to God and each other, we must still be careful as we process the information we hear and the changes we see, because it does have the potential to lead us down many wrong paths in our thinking and lead us away from God and not toward Him. We have to make sure that we are not fearful. We have to make sure that our eyes are fixed where they should be, so that we do not allow the situation—the news, the orders that come down from above, and the recommendations that they are enforcing, the projections of how many are going to get sick and how many are going to die and how many ventilators we need and all the rest of that, and just the massive information that we have dumped on us every day about this—we do not want any of that stuff to alter our thinking and course away from God and His Kingdom. Because it could surely undermine us if we allow it.

As my dad was saying this morning, we are the ones that choose to sin. And so, in the same vein, we are the ones that will choose whether we are going to make this a positive or a negative experience, and bring us closer to God or farther away from God.

In the past few weeks, sitting there at home and even before I had to work from home, I found myself watching videos of government officials making pronouncements. I have been reading news articles, scrutinizing executive orders from this, that, or the other resident governor, or what have you. Listening and watching news reports from the MSM, the mainstream media, reading breathless warnings of various observers of every stripe and credibility imaginable. I have done all this to try to make sense of what is going on with this corona virus and the stay at home orders and the recommendations and the numbers that were being given, the potentialities that are out there. The possible repercussions, the problems we may have with our economy, etc. You name it, I have probably heard of it, read it, watched it—and I cannot remember it. It is all too much. It is mind boggling to me. It is too much information to process.

I found it, after these couple of weeks, confusing, frustrating, irritating, and in the end, worthless, futile. It only succeeded in putting me in a bad attitude. Nothing made much sense to me after a while, it was all just a jumble of numbers and ideas and possibilities and consequences and all these things. Some of it, and maybe even more than some of it, maybe much of it or most of it, I do not know how far up the scale you want to go, but some of it at least, was fake. And I knew it was fake. I could tell it was fake. A great deal of it was contradictory, not just controversial but contradictory. One paragraph would contradict the one above it. And I just finally decided I cannot trust any of them. That is, the people who were who were giving me this information.

Is Covid-19 like the flu or is it not? Is Covid-19 like a corona virus—which it is—or is it not? Has it had something added to it by people who are making war through biological weapons? Did it start in North Carolina at the University of North Carolina in their weapons lab? Was it brought over to China by a Chinese person of interest, I will just say at this time, who took it from there and brought

it to Wuhan in *that* particular weapons lab? And then, was it from a bat or was a naturally occurring and they just took it from there? Or was this a manufactured corona virus?

Is the death rate this high number over here, or is it this much lower one over here? Are all the deaths in this much higher number corona virus related? Or did they just have the corona virus in them but they died of a heart attack, or they died of the flu, or they died of pneumonia, or they died of this, that, and the other thing that they already had? So are the numbers that we are getting for corona virus correct at all? Are any of them verified? I do not know. You cannot get anybody to tell you one thing that is true. They will just say, "Ah, fog of war. Confusion." "We don't know. We'll try to figure all this out later."

How about, can you get it from humans? Can you get it from your pets? Can you get it from cloth? Paper, metal, plastic, wood? Is that guy delivering your package at the door putting corona virus on the package and you pick up the package and you get it just because you ordered something from Amazon? Does it come through the air? Does it *stay* in the air? Are masks really that effective? Is six feet actually the proper social distance? I am glad you guys are, I can tell, all of you are more than six feet apart, except you guys and you. But you are married. That is okay.

Is a person contagious for a few days or a week before showing any symptoms? Or could he not show any at all? Can an infected person get it again? Do they develop an immunity or not? Should we use ibuprofen or not while we have it? Some people say no. Some people that say there is not enough evidence to go on. Does hydroxychloroquine work or the regular chloroquine, does that work? Will Vitamin C work? Will Vitamin A work? Will zinc work? Elderberry juice. Can you just drink hot liquids and kill the thing? Hot air? Can you sit a sauna for extended periods of time or take walks in the desert, will that kill it?

Will these social distancing recommendations last a week, a month, two months? Are we going to go all through the summer before we get out? Will it come around again when cold weather hits? Will we have an economy at all after this is over? Will we see rioting? Will the National Guard be called out? Will there be martial law? Is this a sign of the end?

Those are all the things that have been running through my mind and a lot more that I did not write down, because this is just the great flood of information that has been dumped on us. In every one of those things that I just mentioned, there is a counter argument. And in this day and age, with with all the social media and everything, everyone, and I underline, bold, and put in all caps, **EVERYONE** has an opinion, and you cannot find the truth in all the opinions. It is no wonder I was frustrated.

After a few days, I realized sitting there in front of my computer, that I had doubts about every supposed authority who was feeding me this information—from the president and every member of his task force that I heard from, to national journalists, to world renowned doctors and academics, to local officials, to crackpot, and not quite so crackpot prophecy watchers and conspiracy theorists, and everybody else in between. I cannot trust *anybody* to tell me the truth, and I do not know if *anyone* really knows the truth. I do not. That is just the facts.

Somebody will tell me, write to me, send me an email, and they will say, "Read this article." And you know, it is blah, blah, blah, whatever it happens to be, it does not matter what the subject is, I could go to that article and it may be mildly plausible, but I cannot verify it. I do not know if it is right or wrong. I may have some ideas in my head because I am mildly educated and I can say, "No, that's stupid," or "Correlation doesn't mean causation," or whatever and use a little bit of rationality about

these things. But it was just adding to the pile of information that was making me more confused and more frustrated, and I could not trust any of it or any of the people who were reporting it. I just figured I cannot trust anyone in this world to tell me the truth because, as I mentioned, I do not know that they know the truth.

I mean, I am getting really cynical. What is actual? What is real? What is right in all this? Is it really right? This is the fundamental thing that I came up with when I was thinking about the actions that we have taken. Is it right that we have quarantined the whole country? Or state by state and finally, we have got to just a few states out there that are not doing this. Is it right that we demand social distancing? Because there is a certain thing out there called herd immunity. And it means that we let this corona virus get out there, go from person to person, and create immunity by a mass of people. And so what we may be doing, and this is another thing I do not know, but just because we are all staying at home, we may be just pushing this off to the time when they say, "Okay, everything's alright," and suddenly we are all infected because we are back together again. Would it have not been better for us to get it and have done with it, rather than have to periods of it? I do not know! That is something I have read. One side, you know, shouts this and the other side shouts that and I do not know really what the truth is. I am not an epidemiologist or, you know, I cannot really figure this out. I have my guesses.

But do you sense my frustration? I am a kind of guy that likes truth. I like to know what is right and what is good. I like to be able to say, "This is it. This is what I believe." Of course I have been brought up that way. I have lived 50 whatever years of my life with that mindset—that I am seeking out the truth. And so in this particular predicament that we are in, I did what I do. I sought out the truth and I found out, this is one of those things that I really cannot figure out. My experience, my education does not give me what I need to say, "This is exactly what is right. And this is what needs to be done," and worse, all the people shouting in my ear are saying so many contradictory things, and it just makes me a little mad. I mean crazy, not angry. Speaking in the British, in this case. I have no way of knowing what is true in this case. How can I base my decisions on people and facts that I do not trust? I do not know. So I just try to do what I *think* best rather than what I *know* best.

Please turn back to Proverbs the 15th chapter. We will read verses two and four.

Proverbs 15:2, 4 The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness. . . . A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

I have lived these verses over the past about a month. I have felt that I have been reading and hearing the foolishness pouring from the mouth of fools and all the twisted facts were breaking my spirit. Just like these verses say. They were deflating my morale, getting me into a bad attitude, getting me down. As I just mentioned, being unable to find the truth was making me a little bit crazy, and that was coming out in frustration. On top of that—there was more. A day or two later, after I began to have some of these feelings, I went down a rabbit hole on the Internet trying to find a date of an event during my college years. I knew that I could find something that would tell me when this had happened that would be within a day or two, and I eventually did find what I was looking for.

But my search led me to a few late 1980s issues of a rag put out by Worldwide Church of God dissidents. I will not name this particular journal, but this publication was put out once a month to shed light on all the things wrong with the Worldwide Church of God and with its leadership. And they would justify it by saying that they were only trying to open the eyes and warn the duped and

brainwashed cult members in the Worldwide Church of God. So they felt they were fully justified in doing this. Here I am reading these things 30 years later, and it was still making me mad. I will not divulge any details of what I read. But according to this publication, which will remain nameless, just about everybody in any position of leadership in the Worldwide Church of God, and probably three quarters of the members from the way they were going at it, had a skeleton in the closet and they were going to let us know what they were. *Everybody* was fair game. Herbert Armstrong, Garner Ted Armstrong, Joseph W. Tkach, Roderick C. Meredith, Herman Hoeh, Raymond McNair, and a slew of others. If I stood here trying to name all the people that they were talking about, I would be here over-long.

According to them, all Worldwide Church of God leaders were either crooks, adulterers, racists, thieves, fences, liars, perverse. You name it. Just have a list of sins and you would find a Worldwide Church of God leader who had one of these. I knew many of these people. I had spoken to them, shaken their hands, some of them I had spent a good amount of time with, and I had no idea that they were this bad. I would have stayed away if I had known this, that they were such horrible people. Of course, at the time I was a naive and unsophisticated college student, so they could have easily fooled me. But I do not think they were nearly half as bad as what this particular rag said they were.

But the point here is that all this verbal trash was crushing my spirit again, on top of all the stuff from Covid-19, and it was leaving me disgusted, distrustful, and very frustrated, and I was finding that I had little respect for human leaders at all. It was draining out the bottom like a rushing stream. If even one-tenth of what I was reading were true, those men would have lost my respect instantly. That afternoon, after I read those reports, I would not have followed any of them out the door if my house was burning. I just did not trust them.

But then my rational mind kicked in, and I was glad of that I still had a mind that would kick in. And I remembered those verses from Psalm 118 and Psalm 146 and I corrected myself. I told myself, ultimately my trust is in God, not in men or a son of man, not in princes, not in anyone of a fleshly nature. And I thought, you know, my trust ultimately is not even in the ones that God has chosen to lead us in the church. Yes, Scripture tells us to obey and respect those who lead us. You can find that in Hebrews 13:17. But it also says they are going to have to give an account for their leadership. Says it in that same verse. So they are under judgment, too. But our real trust, our real faith should be in the Father and in His Son because They are the ones that are going to bring us into the Kingdom of God. No human is able to do that. There is no riding on coattails.

People have said to me, "Why don't you publish more of Mr Armstrong's stuff? Why don't you have Mr Armstrong speak every once in a while via an audio recording?" And I have to say that the answer is, "Mr Armstrong—I'm sorry, but he really doesn't matter anymore. God used him, but he allowed him to die." We are not going to get anywhere saying that we have memorized all the words of Herbert Armstrong. That is not where it is. You know, there are churches out there who are worshipping Mr Armstrong and putting all he did on a pedestal. But he was a man, and our trust cannot be in doing what Mr Armstrong did or being able to parrot what Mr Armstrong said. Our trust is in Christ. He is the Head of the church, not Mr Armstrong, not a dead man. We have a living Savior and we will be saved by His life. So God obviously allowed Mr Armstrong to die and He raised up somebody else. And *he* died.

Even my father. We are not following him necessarily. We follow him as he follows Christ, as the apostle Paul said that he wanted them to do there in the first century. But ultimately we are not following him. We are following Jesus Christ. He is the Head of the church because *every* man is

fallible. *Every* man has flaws. *Every* man has sins. And if we forget that or expect too much perfection, too much righteousness, or what have you, we are going to be disappointed and it is going to undermine our faith, our trust. Human leaders can be helps, or they could be hindrances, but we must always see beyond them and their faults. Because humans are finite, humans are flawed. They will pass away. How many times does the Bible say that man is like grass and they rise up and they have their day in the sun and then they die, they wither. That is the way men are.

But it is not that way with our God. He is forever. He is always fresh as a daisy, if I may put it that way. He is always going to be giving us the truth. He never changes. And so that is where we put our faith—in the One who never changes, the One who always is, the One who gives life, the One who is the truth. Did we not read it at Passover? That Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. We have to always keep Him in mind, Him in our eyesight, so that we can follow Him on the way to the Kingdom of God.

Let us go back to Exodus the 12th chapter. This is the point where I want to bring in the things from Israel's exodus out of Egypt. Remember, my subject here is about human leaders versus Christ. We need to keep our eyes on Christ rather than the human leaders. Here we go from verse 26. This is talking about the Passover.

Exodus 12:26-28 "And it shall be when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.'" So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

Exodus 12:31-41 Then he [this is Pharaoh] called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, and go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the Lord as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also." And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves. Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day [this day here, first day of Unleavened Bread]—it came to pass that all the armies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.

The story of the Israelites keeping the Passover and their subsequent departure from Egypt on the first day of Unleavened Bread is what we have just summarized here. What I wanted in those verses, in both the Passover instructions and also the instructions on the first day of Unleavened Bread as

they were preparing to leave, is that it is twice mentioned that the children of Israel *did* as Moses had told them, by the instruction of God. So there was a hierarchy there, a headship. God gave the command and Moses, through Aaron, let the people know what was going to go on. And the people listened. The people listened to Moses because God was behind it. This was maybe the high point of their belief because (maybe it was at Sinai, who knows?) at least at this point, they were willing to leave on Moses' word.

Think about this. At this point, the people had no real token of God's presence other than the reality of the plagues. They had not seen anything yet, other than the plagues, that would suggest that God was there behind Moses. But it was a strong enough thing to have seen ten plagues, only three of which they had suffered themselves, but seven of which they were protected from by the word of the Lord. He had told Moses, "Tell them that you in Goshen will not be affected by these plagues," and they were not. So they could see that God's word was actually coming to pass. But they had no real token, no reality that they could grab on to say God is there behind Moses.

The pillar of cloud and fire is first mentioned in Exodus 13:21-22. It says there, "The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people."

Now, if you do any studying about this, the pillar of fire and cloud, there is a question about when it first appeared. Did it appear in front of Moses as they were walking out of Rameses? We probably just assumed that, but the way that is written here and at the end of chapter 13, it appears that it might have actually started at Succoth. I do not know. That is a problem. We do not know exactly when the pillar of fire came. So maybe at Rameses, they were following Moses without a token of God's presence, which was later shown in the pillar of cloud and fire. I do not know.

Did it start Rameses? It may have. Did it start at Succoth? Perhaps. The way it is written here at the end of Exodus 13 there is a question, and it is never satisfactorily answered in Scripture. It just says they followed the pillar of fire, or pillar of cloud throughout the wilderness, and it did not go away, as we saw earlier. It did not go away the whole 40 years, and when it stopped, they stopped, and when it moved, they moved. And so for 40 years, they had that pillar of fire at night or the pillar of cloud during the day that they could look up and say, "My God is in that cloud. He's there. He's right up top." Once they got the Tabernacle built, He was right over the Tabernacle. So there was the token that they needed as physical fleshly people to understand that their God was with them.

Let us go back to Exodus 2 and what I am going to be doing over the next several minutes here, probably more like a half an hour, is I am going to be talking about Moses and Moses' leadership because he was the human that was leading them. And as much as we praise Moses, he was not lily white. He was a man like we are. He had his problems and the Israelites knew that he was a man and they knew his problems. We will skip down over the part where he is drawn out of the water by Pharaoh's daughter.

Exodus 2:11a Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens.

By this time, Moses is approaching 40 years old, if he is not 40 already. So he is quite grown. He is an adult and had been adult for 20 years or so. He had had a lot of experiences, but it is just, finally, after all these years, that he takes the time to look at his kin, the Israelites, and see what they were going through.

Exodus 2:11b-15 And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. [This is brutal, pretty much cold blooded murder.] And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, "Why are you striking your companion?" Then he said, "Who made you a prince and judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" So Moses feared and said, "Surely this thing is known!" [He thought he had gotten away with it up to that point.] When Pharaoh heard of the matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.

Let us think of this in terms of the Israelites coming out of Egypt 40 years later. To them, Moses was a known quantity. He had been gone for 40 years, but they knew who he was. Everybody knew who he was. There was hardly a person who could avoid knowing who Moses was. They surely remembered him. Memories like that are long and strong. He was perhaps the only Israelite raised and educated in the Egyptian court. He was their golden child, was he not?

How many hopes were in that man as he was growing up that he would affect some sort of change for Israel? They knew, according to Josephus, that he had become a successful general, that he had taken Pharaoh's armies out on campaigns and had won battles for him. They knew, that because he was the son of Pharaoh's daughter, that he was next in line to the throne of Egypt. Oh, if he would only become the Pharaoh, they would be free. And they knew that he threw all of that away by killing an Egyptian for beating an Israelite.

So what was their impression of Moses? If we could have asked the average Joe Israelite out on the street before Moses came back with Aaron after those 40 years, what would they have said? What would have been top of mind about Moses? Would they say, "Oh, he's an Israelite with power. But he solves every problem with violence. He's like an oppressor." That is what the Egyptians did, did they not? Their every problem was solved with the whip. Moses took it one step further and actually killed the oppressor.

Would they say, "Oh, he's a pagan. We saw him do all kinds of stuff with with the Pharaoh." Maybe it was true, maybe it was not. But he had grown up in Pharaoh's court. Would he not have been required to attend their pagan festivities? Their religious services? Would they say, "Ah Moses. He's a collaborator. He's part of that Pharaoh cabal. He's a quisling. He's not on our side. He knows where his bread is buttered," or matzo.

Would they say, "Ah, Moses! He's lived in luxury all his life, and you know where that luxury came from? By our sweat and tears. We built everything, all the homes that he lived in. We made all the things that they exported. Moses just is a user and on our backs." Or would they say, "Moses? Moses doesn't understand us at all. He spent all his time in Pharaoh's house, all his time out on campaign. He only looked in on us once, and that went really well. He doesn't understand what's going on with us. He's not a real Israelite."

Could you see that kind of reaction from people? It is very possible.

Let us go to Exodus 4. We are going to read verses 19 and 20 and then down to 24 through 26.

Exodus 4:19-20, 24 Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, "Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead." Then Moses took his wife and his sons and he set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand. . . . And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him.

Oh, this is something that really confounds people. Here in the previous chapters God had given him all this instruction. Go back to Egypt, save your people. Here is a rod. You can do these miracles. If they ask you this, tell them this. Prepared him for His work and as soon as He gets him on the road, He tries to kill him. They do not understand. But you know, it is quite shocking for someone who really does not know the Bible were very well to come across this, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him.

Exodus 4:25-26 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, "Surely you are a husband of blood to me!" So He [God] let him go. Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!"—because of the circumcision.

Okay, let us figure this into all the matter here about Moses. This is a rather black mark against Moses. Consider: He was supposed to be *the* Israelite, the leader of the Israelites, the one that they all looked to and followed, and he had failed to circumcise his son. It says that he took his sons, but in the passage there, it says it was just one son that was circumcised. So maybe he had circumcised the one, but not the other. Shows a little double mindedness. Or maybe he was really busy. I do not know. But for some reason, he did not circumcise this particular son.

Do you realize what that was? Failure to circumcise his son was a sign of rejection of the Abrahamic covenant that all Israelites were supposed to do. All Israelite men were to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant. That they were in agreement with God and what God was going to do with the people of Abraham. God met him and tried to kill him because he could not allow His servant to disobey this most basic part of the bond between Him and His people. This is right at the base of belief at that time, right at the base of that fellowship, that communion with God, and Moses had failed. He had sinned in this by not circumcising his son.

Now we do not know the exact reason. Some have speculated that Moses may have done this to appease Zipporah. Maybe she was against it. Maybe this is why one was circumcised and not the other. Maybe he had circumcised the older one and not the younger one, because she had objected to it. Perhaps. Interesting thought, because the Midianites probably should have been circumcised. They were from Abraham, but I guess they had ceased doing the practice. Another idea is that he had been so long in Midian (40 years, that is a long time), that he thought that he would just become part of Jethro's house. He would become a Midianite, and thus his son would be a Midianite, not an Israelite, so that he did not need to circumcise him in the Israelite way. Perhaps, I do not know. It does not say.

Either way, this is not a good look for the leader of Israel—to not have circumcised his son. But God forces it and Moses returns to Egypt, and at first all is well. Let us look at verse 27.

Exodus 4:27 And the Lord said Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him on the mountain of God and kissed him. So Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.

So the Israelites were persuaded, they saw the signs. Evidently they did not hold much against Moses. At least this time, their anger had cooled a little bit. Or their suspicions. I do not know, but they seem to accept it and maybe it was because they knew Aaron. I do not know. Aaron was probably the one speaking, and so it could have been Aaron, not Moses, that they were really listening to it and saying, "Oh, well, if Aaron thinks this is right, then that's fine." It is interesting to think that when Moses went up on the mount, they immediately gravitated toward Aaron and he was very willing to go along with them. So it just makes for some interesting thinking in terms of the relationships that were happening here.

So the people are convinced and they believe and that is good. Let us go to the next chapter. Chapter five versus six through nine. Now this is Moses and Aaron going before Pharaoh. They tell Pharaoh what they want. This is Pharaoh's response.

Exodus 5:6-9 On 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. And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore, they cry out, saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Let more work be laid on the men, that they may labor in it, and let them not regard false words."

So that was his response. You know that is not going to sit well with the Israelites. So here is their response.

Exodus 5:15-22 Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why are you dealing thus with your servants? There is no straw given to your servants, and they say to us, 'Make brick!' And indeed your servants are beaten, but the fault is in your own people." But he said, "You are idle! Idle! Therefore you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' Therefore go now and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the quota of bricks." And the officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble after it was said, "You shall not diminish any bricks from your daily quota." Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them. [I wonder how tense that was!] 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?"

So who do they blame? Just at the end of the last chapter they had bowed their head and worshipped and said, essentially, "This is a good plan." And here, by the time we get to the end of the next chapter, they are ready to string him up. They blame Moses for all their problems. You know, several

hundred years later, Ahab called Elijah the troubler of Israel. That is essentially what they are saying about Moses at this point. "You brought this on us, Moses. It's all your fault. All your big demands from Pharaoh and he turned them around, and we've gotta pay, not you." I can imagine the conspiracy theorists among them thinking that Moses and Pharaoh were in this together. This was a grand conspiracy between Moses and Pharaoh because Pharaoh wanted to get more out of the Israelite slaves. So Moses had riled him up thinking that they were going to be sent out of the country and free. And now this was just a reason to make them work harder and produce more.

I do not know. Did they have conspiracy theorists back then? I am sure they did. It is just part of the human condition. We always think about things that *may* be happening behind the scenes.

Let us move forward. Consider Moses here because the scene switches to him. Chapter six, verse one after he complains.

Exodus 6:1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."

So He is trying to give Moses a pep talk here and says, "Look, the plans are going forward. It's just as I said. I'm going to work with Pharaoh," and this will turn out to produce the redemption that He promised.

Exodus 6:6-9 Therefore say to the children of Israel, 'I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burden 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 would not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.

God makes one of His most magnificent statements *ever*, and He just lays it all on the line here. "I'm going to do this. I'm the one that's going to bring you out. I'm the one that's going to take you. I'm going to do this and bring you into the land which I swore to your fathers." So He says, "It's *Me* who's doing all this stuff. I'm the one behind Moses." But they would not listen to Moses now. Moses had gotten in their craw. He had made them work and it had distressed them so much they felt like I felt with all my frustration with what was going on now. They had anguish of spirit and, well, I did not have the cruel bondage, but they felt frustrated. They felt irritated. They felt aggrieved.

So they would not trust Moses. They could not see that redeeming the children of Israel from Egypt was a matter that was far above the human level. It was not based on Moses' persuasive abilities, nor was it based on Pharaoh's concession to God. You can read throughout the whole series there of the plagues that there are a couple times when Pharaoh said, "I've had enough, you can go," and then God would harden his heart. He had to get ten plagues in, so he kept hardening Pharaoh's heart. It was not a decision of Pharaoh's. Moses did not have to be a great orator because none of this was happening because they were doing all this tremendous work. It was good work. But the Prime Mover, the One who was making everything really happen, was God Himself. On both sides. He was using His sovereign will and He was working with one side and manipulating the other.

The redemption of the Israelites from Egypt was a purely divine action, and all the humans that were a part of it followed along. Obviously they did their part. But God takes all the credit for it in this passage. "I did it." He had made it all happen. So, in a sense, it could have been anyone in either Moses' or Pharaoh's places. God could have worked with inevitably anybody else to get the work done. But He had chosen Moses, and Pharaoh was the Pharaoh of Egypt at the time, and He worked with them. But He was the one who did the work, the real work. He was working for doing His will for His purposes.

So we have to start thinking along spiritual lines here that the human leadership is not as important as we tend to make it. God uses it—for good, hopefully. He uses it for good, whether the person, the human, actually cooperates and does good, well, that is what I said earlier. That is part of their judgment. It will be according to their works. But God is leading His people, the whole group, all the people, into a certain position and fellowship with Him, and He is doing all the work. What we do as leaders in the church is very minor compared to all the work that God is doing. And that is why the faith and the trust have to be in God and not in the human leader.

Let us go to chapter 14. I really do not envy Moses at all. He spent 40 years herding cats in the Israelites, and it was not an easy job. There was constant friction. He was not trusted in many cases. They were constantly trying to rebel against him and fault him for things. And he did a wonderful job. He was not, as I have painted him, this black, and we will see that in just a few minutes. But I am trying to look at it from the perception of the Israelites, and their trust in him, because in many cases they did not. They did not trust him at all. In chapter 14 I want you to see that by this time, Moses was in a difficult position. I will just put it that way. This is at the Red Sea.

Exodus 14:10 And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

Now this is another episode where the Israelites distrust and complain against him. Think about what they may have thought about him at this point. What were the words that they were using to describe Moses? Well, probably fool and stupid and mass murderer were on the top of the list there because what Moses had done, at God's command, was to make a turn and that turn brought the children of Israel in basically an undefensible situation. They had mountains on two sides. They had the Red Sea behind them. And, of course, Pharaoh was bearing down with all his charioteers at their back and so they must have thought they were going to die. That Pharaoh and all his chariots were just going to slice through them and the ones that were not killed in that assault would be herded up and taken back to Egyptian slavery. They thought it was all over here.

(If you want more about that, you can go and listen to my sermon from April 2000, "Escape from Box Canyon" where I go over all this.)

But this was not a good time for Moses. Let us see what they said.

Exodus 14:11-12 Then they said to Moses [They were crying out to the Lord but this is what they said to Moses.], "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

They were ready to give it up. "You didn't listen to us, Moses. We told you this was a fool's errand and here we are out at the edge of the wilderness and we are going to die now." Moses' reply is a way of trying to seek to calm them.

Exodus 14:13-14 So Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

So this is a good thing to say. It is very positive. It is very faithful. He says, "If you'll just be patient, God will save you." It was a proper thing. It was a good call. You and I in that situation would not have done any better than to say something like that. But you know what? It is funny. In God's eyes, what Moses said there was a half measure.

Exodus 14:15 And the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward."

Think of that. There is a very important lesson here. Moses was saying, "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." You could just see Charlton Heston saying that before all the children of Israel. Just be patient. Just watch. God will intervene. And God says, "What do you mean, I'll intervene? Move forward." Moses tells the people to stand still. God tells them to go forward. Do you see a difference there? I kind of pity Moses at this point because the people were enraged at him. Who knows? They might have been throwing vegetables or rocks or what have you at him. And on the other hand, God seems to be irritated at him. What are you crying to Me for? Move forward. It seems like he could not please either of them at this point.

So, true, he did speak *words* of faith, but God wanted *works* of faith. He did not want just words. He wanted action. Actions speak louder than words. That is leadership. Moses was doing a half measure here. He was not really leading. He needed to step out into the water, as it were. Not easy to do. He was trying to do with oratory what God wanted done with example. But it still got done.

Exodus 14:30 So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord and believed the Lord and his servant Moses.

So it worked out pretty well in the end, at least to this point. But it could have been better. It seems very interesting to me and amazing to me that God puts these things in. This should have been the greatest success for Moses ever. And God puts it in His Word that he did not do exactly what He wanted. He said the right words, but he did not walk out ahead of the people. He was talking a good fight, but he was not showing it in action. Let us go to Numbers 12. This will be my last example from Moses.

Numbers 12:1 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

What happens here? This is another black mark against Moses in the eyes of the people. And what was worse is that the accusation was brought against him by his very own sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron. Remember those 40 years in which he grew up and became an adult before he killed the

Egyptian man? Well, apparently when he was a young man, he was a general, Moses had married an Ethiopian princess to make peace with the Ethiopians while he was on campaign there for Pharaoh. And when she heard of Moses and all the miracles and the work that he was doing in Egypt, she decided to come join him and the Israelites as they left Egypt.

You can imagine the stir that this caused in the camp of Israel. The Ethiopians do not look like Israelites. She would have been very visible among the people. And then to find out that this woman was Moses' first wife. Can you imagine the rumor and the gossip that was going around camp? How can this be? Moses did not marry an Israelite woman, he married an Ethiopian woman and then left her. And then later, when he went into the wilderness, he married somebody else, a Midianite woman. Again, not an Israelite. What kind of Israelite is Moses? All kinds of skeletons were falling out of Moses' closet at this point. At least, if you were of that mind, that way of thinking.

It was a political marriage. It had been done to forestall any further fighting in a war that the Ethiopians knew that they were going to lose. Think about it. Moses and this Ethiopian woman had been separated for 40 years or more. Who knows how long it had been? But it was still a scandal. It was enough that Miriam and Aaron decided to make it public. Now notice that God makes no judgments about this scandal at all. He just kind of let it stand. And consider that Moses was about 80 years old and this Ethiopian woman was probably at least 55 or 60 years old, depending on, you know, when it was in their lives that they had gotten married.

What God becomes furious about is Miriam especially, and Aaron, becoming all self righteous about it and using it to score, what we would call, political points. Look at verses 4-10 and we get God's estimation of Moses.

Numbers 12:4-10 Suddenly, the Lord said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. Then the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; and I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak to him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" So the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and He departed. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper.

We see God's estimation of His servant, Moses, as opposed to all those things that I brought up earlier in the text here. Not only was Moses the humblest or the meekest man on the face of the earth, which is said in verse three, but he was faithful despite what the Israelites, and even his family members, may have thought of him. *God had his back completely*. He was in his corner despite him having very human flaws, despite having some skeletons in his closet. Despite all the little mistakes he may have made along the way.

You see, what happens with Miriam and Aaron here, and with the Israelites, is what happens when we concentrate on the man and not on God. We see the man's sins, and he will have sins. And those sins undermine our trust both in him and in God who is behind him. In John 13:20, Jesus says, "He who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." It goes all the way up the chain. If you receive God's servant, then you also receive Jesus Christ and

you receive God, the Father. Paul says, "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." That is in Romans 14:4.

God backs His servants. It is always a precarious thing to criticize one of God's servants. It does not usually end well for the criticizer, even if they may be right. Because first, God does not take it lightly. And second, what it does is it reveals in the criticizer a blindness to God and to His work, or a lack of faith in Him. It reveals, actually, more of the critic than it may of one he is accusing.

We could have gone into many other of God's Old Testament servants. We would have seen similar sins and weaknesses. Just to name some of them: Abraham—He lied. Jacob—he had a whole slew of problems, but he was a deceiver. Gideon—He needed so much proof that God was going to work. Samson—Samson was a real gem. He had a thing for the ladies. Samuel—He had a problem with his kids. So did David. And on top of that, David had problem with with Bathsheba and Uriah, and he did not follow God's instruction, like in bringing the ark back. There were a lot of things that were wrong with that man. All those problems, but God backed every one of them because He had called them to do a work.

And you know what? God always succeeded in doing His will through those ones that He had called to do His work. No matter what their character was, His purpose was done. His will was done. The children of Israel in the wilderness too often saw only the man Moses. They failed to look up to see that pillar of cloud and of fire and remember that God was there behind him.

Let us go to Hebrews 12. My dad sneaked this verse in this morning. He actually did not read it, but he just mentioned it. So that helps to put these two messages together.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [other servants of God], let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us [Is that not what this Feast of Unleavened Bread is all about?], and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus [This was my point throughout this whole sermon.], the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of throne of God.

We have to learn the lesson that the Israelites so often failed to learn. We must keep our faith fixed on the Lord, on our Savior, Jesus Christ. Because He is the one who will finish what He starts and successfully lead us into His Kingdom.