

INTRODUCTION

We love to hear feel-good stories with a happy ending. Some time ago I told you about the success of a former St. Louis Rams quarterback named Kurt Warner. He has a humble beginning. Warner grew up in Iowa and in 1993 he graduated from a small college there. Warner dreamed to play in the professional arena. But he was not drafted by any team. Eventually, one team invited him to try out in the training camp. But Warner was released before the season began. With nowhere else to go to, he went back to his home state and worked in a grocery store for \$5.50 an hour. Later, an opportunity came for Warner to play indoor football. He played so well that people began to take note of his talents. In 1997, Warner had another opportunity to get into an NFL team. Unfortunately, he was not even able to attend the tryout due to an injury caused by a spider bite. Finally, Warner was acquired by the St. Louis Rams in 1998 as a third-string quarterback. He only had limited play time. After some personnel changeover in the following year, Warner became a backup to the starter. Warner's shining moments came when the starting quarterback was injured in a pre-season game. Warner became a star that season and led the team to a Super Bowl champion. Warner struggled a lot before he was successful. While there are people like Warner, there are many others living with unfulfilled dreams. They have the skills and potential. But they never get the right opportunity. Are you one of them? Some of you had to quit school to help support your family. Perhaps you left a promising career in your home country, hoping that your children can have a better future. May be your colleague is promoted instead of you because you cannot speak perfect English. Moses could identify with you. Forty years had passed and finally God called Moses. But Moses still had to wait for the right time before God finally led the Israelites out of Egypt. From Moses' experience we shall learn that God's promises will never change despite our circumstances.

EXPLANATION

1. 罪惡的束縛 The Oppression of Sin

First, let us learn about the oppression of sin from this passage. On the surface it seems that the problem was about the Israelites fighting for their freedom. It looks like the liberation of African American slaves in the U.S. history. But as the story unfolds in the following chapters it is clear God was waging wars against the deities of Egypt. The true battle was spiritual in nature. God was about to set the Israelites free from the bondage of sin so that they could worship Him. Moses and Aaron followed God's instruction and went to Pharaoh to make a plea. How did the king respond? Look at **verse 2**: Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go." Pharaoh stated that he did not know this God of the Hebrews. There was a trace of contempt in his answer: "If your God is real then why do you become slaves?" Moses and Aaron replied in **verse 3**: ... "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword." At that time, it was reasonable for a king to grant foreigners permission to worship their gods. After all, a leader might not want to provoke any god. Notice Moses and Aaron specified that if their people

disobeyed Jehovah, they would be punished. The hidden message was: “Hey Pharaoh, I don’t think it’s smart for you to mess with our God!” But Pharaoh would not budge. What can the god of slaves do? Pharaoh did not only reject the request, he intensified his oppression to the Israelites. In **verses 7-8** Pharaoh told the Egyptian slave drivers and the Israelite foremen: 7 “You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. 8 But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don’t reduce the quota.” Pharaoh ordered to stop providing the materials for the Israelites to make bricks, but they were required to produce the same output. Straw is to strengthen dry mud the same way as steel rods reinforce concrete. Pharaoh increased the pressure on the Israelites to keep them under control. After all, the same strategy had been working for the past 400 years! Sin has its oppressive power to hold people in bondage. The Bible tells us that we are slaves of sin before we know Christ. Paul explained in **Romans 6:22** - But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. Notice that there is no middle ground. We are either slaves to sin or slaves of God. The contrasting result is eternal death versus eternal life. Either Jesus is your Lord, or someone or something else is your master. For example, money is a blessing from God. But the love of money can become a bondage. (The following story can only be fully understood in Chinese.) A couple was sitting in the living room. Suddenly the husband turned to his wife and asked: “What is the current number?” (In Chinese it sounds like “what time is it?”) The wife replied: “Goodness! It is 4 o’clock already. How come you forgot to pick Johnny up from school?” The man was not shocked. He rephrased his question: “No, I am not asking you the time. I am asking you about the Dow Jones index.” He paid so much attention to the stock market that he did not care about his son. A scary thing about sin is that we can be under its oppression even when we do not feel anything about it. People crown it with a beautiful name like ambition, passion or hobby. Do you worship Jesus Christ as your Lord, or are you worshipping someone or something? Most of us should agree that addiction of any kind or superstition is oppressive. But what about something that people see as neutral like career, entertainment or relationship. The things people pursue can become their masters. If you can stop doing something at any time without any hangover then you are the master of that thing. Some of us cannot live half a day without our cellphones or computers. Many people cannot stop chasing after what their neighbors have. Those things can become your master! May the Lord help us to make up our mind to serve Him alone.

2. 痛苦的壓制 The Depression of Pain

The Israelites were under the oppression of sin. Moses and Aaron told them that God would deliver them. But the reality made them feel that the contrary was true. Pharaoh forced them to labor even harder. The slave masters beat them because they failed to meet the quota. They were inflicted by the depression of pain. The Israelite foremen thus launched a complaint to Pharaoh in **verse 15-16**: ... 15 “Why have you treated your servants this way? 16 Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, ‘Make bricks!’ Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.” Of course, nothing would change Pharaoh’s mind. He then reiterated his commands. After the Israelite foremen left the palace they met Moses and Aaron. You can guess what happened next. They grumbled! Listen to **verse 21**: ... “May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.” To summarize in five words: “It is all your fault!” They thought their lives might be better if Moses and Aaron kept their mouth shut. Things just got worse after they

presented their fancy idea of leaving Egypt. Poor Moses and Aaron! All those among us who aspire to become leaders have to take note. You cannot lead others if you do not have ears ready to listen to people's complaints. I once jokingly shared a tip with a Caucasian brother. I said in a Chinese church few people will praise you directly if you did well. But if you did something bad they will tell others behind your back. But I know our church is much better than that! Back to the story. How did Moses and Aaron deal with people's complaint? They took it to the next level. Looks at **verses 22-23**: 22 Moses returned to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? 23 Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all." Moses brought his grievances to God as if he were making an appeal to the Supreme Court. God is merciful. He listens to our grumble in pain. The book of Psalm contains many prayers for deliverance when people did not see any trace of hope. For example, in **Psalm 13:1-2** the psalmist lamented: 1 How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? The author questioned God four times with "how long?" Pain can be depressing because it grinds our morale. We ask: why bother to try when it does not do any good? Patience is a hard lesson to learn. Who needs God when everything is going great? But we need much faith when there seems to be no foreseeable change. I used to know a young couple. They went through what typical overseas students have to deal with – graduation, job search and immigration status. At that time, they could not find any job. They were wondering if they should get married and the sister went back to school just to maintain a legal status. They love the Lord and they wanted to follow His will. However, there were just too many unknowns. I listened to them as they poured their hearts out. The sister groaned: "It is too hard!" I could imagine my sons uttering the same comment to me in the days to come: "Dad, it is too hard!" There was a little voice inside me saying: "Don't worry, my dear child. God will give you enough grace for that challenge." Finally, they decided to go back to their home country. They found jobs and they soon got married. Some time later they had their first baby. They shared their baby pictures on WeChat. Everything went well. But a few weeks later the sister sent out an urgent prayer request because their son was diagnosed with a prenatal disease. Their baby later died. One crisis after another, this young couple relied on the Lord and stood firm in their faith. We have a choice when we are facing the depression of pain. We can conclude that the world is not fair to us. Life is a monotonous routine without any meaning. However, God wants us to wait on Him, knowing that He has full control of our situation. That is exactly what God tried to teach the Israelites.

3. 盼望的宣告 The Expression of Hope

The Israelites were oppressed from the outside by a ruthless king. They felt depressed on the inside because of the pain they suffered. God assured Moses that His plan had never changed. He expressed hope to Moses in **6:1** - Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country." Twice the Lord reminded Moses that His mighty hand would triumph over Pharaoh. God continued to say in **verses 2-3**: ... 2 "I am the Lord. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them." God would not change because He was the same God who revealed Himself to the forefathers of Israel. The current generation of the Israelites did not know Him

because He had yet to show Himself to them. God chose Abraham years ago and made a covenant with him. Let me refer you back to [Genesis 17:6-8](#) - 6 “I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.” God promised to bless Abraham in various ways. First, Abraham would have many descendants. Since the Israelites settled in Egypt they had exponential growth. God would continue to fulfill the rest of the promises. Look at [verse 4](#): “I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens.” God would give the area where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob once settled to Israel as its future home. God would also build an intimate relationship with His people. It reads in [verse 7](#): “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.” God’s plan was not just to relocate the Israelites to Canaan. The Israelites would know their God in a personal way. God entered into a covenantal relationship with Abraham. God would eventually fulfill all His promises. Nowadays after we signed a contract we still try to find ways to bargain on the terms for our own gain. When my family moved to Memphis last year we leased a rental property. It was supposed to be a one-year contract, but the management was so gracious to make it only 11-month long. The contract specifies the penalty if we move out earlier. After my family bought a house, I negotiated with the management and they agreed to reduce the punishment. That was not the end of it. We were also required to clean the carpet after we have moved out. I asked the management to go ahead and contact a cleaner to do the work, then send me an invoice. Weeks later I checked with the agent. She told us that since we were good tenants the cleaning cost would be waived. That was wonderful! My point is that contracts between humans can be altered as long as both sides agree with the changes. However, God’s promises are as solid as concrete. Whatever God says it, He will act on it accordingly. We can hold onto God’s promises as we pray. When you have uncertainty about your future, you can say to God: “Lord, please grant me Your peace that transcends all understanding.” When you face a difficult decision, you can pray: “God, You promise to give wisdom generously to whoever asks You.” I am not asking you to manipulate God by making Him your puppet. Quite the contrary. God is pleased when we put our hope in His promises and present our petitions according to His own Word. God told Moses that He would make the Israelites His own people. While Pharaoh saw the Israelites as tools to be exploited, God treated them as His beloved children. As Christians, we have a loving Heavenly Father. Are we enjoying an intimate relationship with Him? Or do we live in constant fear of God’s punishment if we do not read the Bible, do not attend church meetings or do not make offering? When we serve the Lord, do we do so joyfully or grudgingly?

CONCLUSION

God’s promises will never change despite our circumstances. It is because He is always in full control. The problems we face are not about our upbringing, or environment. It is not about our lack of talents or opportunity. Ultimately, the root problem is sin problem. Through Jesus Christ, God rescues us from the oppression of sin, overcomes our depression of pain and kindles an expression of hope. When we come to Christ and follow Him we can experience the true freedom as children of God.