

Message 5

OUTWORKING OF FAITH – WORKING TOGETHER WITH GOD

As I was pondering over the issue of faith and its outworking, I was impressed with the truth in 2 Corinthians 6:1, that we are working together with God.

2 Corinthians 6:1

And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—

To live a fruitful and meaningful life, we have to work together with God, not just in our own life, but also in fulfilling God's eternal purpose. This will be clear when we examine the context of chapters 5 and 6 – where Paul talks about Christ's death on the Cross for the sins of the whole world, and God entrusting to us, His ambassadors, the ministry of reconciliation. It is indeed a great privilege that we can have a part in fulfilling God's great purpose.

To work together with God, we need His grace to draw us to Himself and to guide, strengthen and enable us, moment by moment.

However, Paul also warns us that it is possible for us to receive God's grace in vain. Although we serve an almighty God, and God's grace is available to us, we can live a wasted life. But it need not be.

As we work with God, we have to be mindful that it is not an equal partnership. He is God, and we are His creatures; He is our heavenly Father, and we are His children. It is His purposes, not ours, that we are seeking to work out, and we must do so according to His ways, not ours.

At times, God's ways may appear puzzling. Various questions may come to our minds. At such times, we should continue to live by faith, actively working out with God, looking to Him and cooperating with Him.

To illustrate the importance of this approach in the outworking of faith, I would like to consider with you a historical event recorded in the Book of Exodus.

Deliverance from Egypt

The deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt is a very important event, one to which the Jews constantly look back. Whether they are worshipping God and giving thanks to Him or are feeling discouraged, they often look back to this great event to remind themselves of God's greatness and goodness.

There are many lessons we can learn from this account and I would like to share with you some of these from selected portions of the Book of Exodus.

The call of Moses

Let us begin by looking at the account in Exodus 3 of God appearing to Moses in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush. God told Moses that He knew the Jews had been suffering in the land of Egypt. He revealed to Moses His purpose and intention, which was for Moses to lead the sons of Israel out of Egypt.

Exodus 3:10

“Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”

Forty years earlier, as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses was a man of power, position and status. He thought he could do many things. He once intervened when he saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite. He struck down the Egyptian and killed him. When Pharaoh sought to kill him, Moses fled from Egypt (Exod. 2:11-15). Now, after having spent forty years tending sheep in the wilderness, he was very reluctant when God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. He was very conscious of his inability to fulfil this great mission that God had called him to.

Exodus 3:11

But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”

Exodus 4:1

Then Moses said, “What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, ‘The Lord has not appeared to you.’ ”

Moses told God: “Who am I?” In the face of the enormity of the task, Moses felt his own weaknesses and frailties acutely. He knew there would be many difficulties ahead. Who was he that he should go and confront Pharaoh, the mighty ruler of Egypt? How would he be able to lead the nation of Israel? Would they believe him? Would they cooperate with him?

God’s assurance of His presence

To answer Moses’ fear, God said: “Certainly I will be with you” (Exod. 3:12).

Notice the way God answered Moses. He emphasised to Moses that He would be with him. The issue was not how capable or incapable Moses was or saw himself to be. The important thing was that the almighty God would be with him and would be working through him and with him. “I will be with you” – this fact should answer all of Moses’ fears.

God went on to tell Moses that He would manifest His power through him.

Exodus 4:2-7

2 The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff."

3 Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.

4 But the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail"—so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—

5 "that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

6 The Lord furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.

7 Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.

As instructed by God, Moses threw the staff he was holding onto the ground, and it became a serpent. When he grasped the serpent by its tail, it became a staff in his hand. Following God's instruction, Moses put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, his hand became leprous. When he repeated the action, his hand was restored.

However, despite these manifestations of God's power, Moses was still hesitant.

Exodus 4:10-12

10 Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

11 The Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"

12 "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

Moses said that all along he had been slow of speech and slow of tongue. God then reminded Moses that He is the Creator, the One who made his mouth. He assured Moses that He would guide him as to what to say. God was the answer to Moses' predicament. He would enable Moses to accomplish whatever task He entrusted to him. God would demonstrate His power, and He would do it through Moses.

Just as God was with Moses, He too could be with us. But that does not mean everything will be plain sailing. There will be setbacks and difficulties, trials and testing, and these were what the Israelites went through.

*Wavering in the face of difficulties***Exodus 4:31**

So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.

At the beginning, when the Israelites learned that God was concerned about their suffering, they worshipped Him reverently. But, as we shall soon see, when things took a turn for the worse, their trust in God began to waver.

Exodus 5:1-9

1 And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.' "

2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go."

3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."

4 But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get back to your labors!"

5 Again Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!"

6 So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying,

7 "You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves.

8 "But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.'

9 "Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words."

In this passage, we see Pharaoh putting up an obstacle. Not only was he unwilling to let the people go, he was making life harder for the people. What was happening? Were not the Israelites obeying God? Why then did the situation deteriorate?

Here is an important principle on spiritual warfare: As we work out our lives together with God, especially in significant areas, we will meet with difficulties. But that does not mean we are on the wrong track. When we advance in the right direction, we should expect to meet with resistance, for we are engaging Satan and the forces of darkness in the spiritual realm. It is because we are on the right track that we meet with such strong opposition. Satan would intensify his attacks on us. He would seek all ways – including manipulating external circumstances – to discourage us, confuse us, and weaken our faith.

Of course, there will be situations in which the difficulties we encounter are of our own making, or God's indications to us that we are on the wrong track. There could be errors in our lives we need to correct, or approaches we are taking that need to be adjusted. We have to be open and sensitive to His guidance, continually looking to Him to ascertain whether what we are doing is right or wrong.

When the Israelites met with increasing difficulties and hardships, they did not respond well.

Exodus 5:20-21

20 When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them.

21 They said to them, "May the Lord look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us."

They professed belief initially, but became antagonistic towards Moses and Aaron when things became difficult. The response of the Israelites was highly improper. Under the circumstances, even their leader Moses wavered.

Exodus 5:22-23

22 Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me?"

23 "Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all."

Moses questioned the Lord for His apparent inaction. Moses said something to this effect: O Lord, You said that You would deliver Your people. You have sent me, and I have acted in accordance with Your command. But why didn't You deliver Your people? Why is the situation getting from bad to worse?

God in control

We see the Lord responding to Moses:

Exodus 6:1-8

1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he will let them go, and under compulsion he will drive them out of his land."

2 God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord;

3 and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, Lord, I did not make Myself known to them.

4 "I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned.

5 "Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.

6 "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

7 'Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

8 'I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the Lord.' "

God told Moses to watch how He would deal with Pharaoh, and that under compulsion, Pharaoh would eventually let the people go.

In the midst of the trial, the people were not so conscious of God's promise and of His almighty power. Even Moses wavered. So God reminded Moses, and through Moses the Israelites, about His almighty power and the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God had told the people He would be delivering them from Pharaoh. He had the power to do so. They must learn to trust Him. They must trust His timing and His ways. This is an area of truth God's children must learn well. This was just the beginning of the deliverance and the people were already grumbling to the Lord. So God spoke to Moses to reassure His people that He knew what was happening and that He was in control.

Discouragement set in

Moses transmitted God's message to the people, but they did not listen.

Exodus 6:9

So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage.

The people were too affected by their surroundings, by the hardship and the suffering. Their faith was not of high quality. When things were comfortable, when God acted and things began to move, the people believed and rejoiced. But when the going became difficult, they became despondent and would not listen to Moses. The attitude and response of the people had an adverse effect on Moses.

Exodus 6:10-12

10 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

11 "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land."

12 But Moses spoke before the Lord, saying, "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?"

Despite the Lord giving clear instructions to him to go to Pharaoh, Moses told the Lord he was unskilled in speech and not up to the task. Besides, the sons of Israel were not cooperating with him.

Here we see Moses, a great man, chosen of God, yet wavering in faith. In Exodus 5:21, when the people went against him, he wavered. He gained some confidence after God spoke to him, but became discouraged and wavered again when the Israelites did not listen to him.

We see here the importance of support for the leadership in the fulfilling of God's purposes. Believers often look to their leaders for encouragement, and this is proper. Good leaders encourage those under their charge to walk well with the Lord. At the same time, the encouragement of the brethren can mean much to leaders, while negative response of the brethren and lack of encouragement can adversely affect them.

God continued to work

Fortunately in this case, God intervened. If He had not, the outcome could have been disastrous. God was gracious. He stepped in and prevented the whole incident from becoming hopeless. He continued to speak to Moses and Aaron, encouraging them to press on. With God's strengthening, Moses and Aaron could trust God and cooperate with Him, as we see in Exodus 7:8-10.

Exodus 7:8-10

8 Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,

9 "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Work a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.' "

10 So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the Lord had commanded; and Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent.

So, things began to move again. But it would take some time before deliverance came.

The next miracle was even more remarkable. It was a dramatic manifestation of the tremendous power of God. God turned water into blood, not just in one or two places, but throughout the land of Egypt. Even water contained in vessels turned into blood.

Exodus 7:19

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their reservoirs of water, that they may become blood; and there will be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.' "

Yet deliverance delayed

When we read through this long account of the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, it may seem to us to be just a series of incidents and demonstrations of God's power. But try putting ourselves in the shoes of Moses and the Israelites as they went through one incident after another, one miracle after another. They must have been filled with great expectations of deliverance. As Moses obeyed God, following instruction after instruction, each time he must have thought that would be the time God would deliver them. But each time, deliverance did not materialise. He spoke to Pharaoh as instructed by God, yet God did not deliver them. He demonstrated God's power through the rod turning into a serpent. Still, God did not deliver them. And now, all the water in Egypt had been turned into blood. Surely God would deliver them now. Still, there was no deliverance.

Instead, Pharaoh continued to harden his heart, even as God continued to work miracles. In the next miracle, frogs covered the entire land. Imagine frogs coming out to cover the whole land of Egypt!

Exodus 8:6

So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.

At last, there was a positive response from Pharaoh.

Exodus 8:8

Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, "Entreat the Lord that He remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the Lord."

Pharaoh said he would let the people go if God were to remove the frogs. The end seemed to be near and Moses probably heaved a sigh of relief.

But, alas, it was not the end. Just when there was a glimmer of hope, a sudden reversal of events took place.

Exodus 8:15

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

The Lord had already demonstrated His power beyond doubt. Pharaoh had seen and acknowledged it. He had said: "I will let the people go". But now, after Moses entreated the Lord and the frogs were gone, Pharaoh hardened his heart yet again and refused to let the people go. The situation thus continued to appear hopeless.

Deliverance seemed to be just a step ahead, yet it slipped through their fingers. By this time, Moses could have been stumped. He could have wondered what more he had to do before God would deliver them. If we were to face a situation like this,

would we be disheartened by now? Would we have become weary because the battle is so long drawn? Would we question whether deliverance would ever come?

We see in this encounter between Moses and Pharaoh a picture of how spiritual battles can be very long drawn, even over just one issue. This is especially so if the issue is significant.

The confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh was not merely a confrontation between men. Satan and the forces of darkness were deeply involved as the deliverance of Israel from Egypt was a significant event in the fulfilment of God's purposes, and Satan would go all out to thwart it. God told Moses when He was about to inflict the last plague on Egypt that He would execute judgements against all the gods of Egypt (Exod. 12:12). An intense battle was taking place in the spiritual realm.

In this event that we are considering, there were many more rounds of spiritual battles to come. In Exodus 8:24, we see God continuing to manifest His power, causing insects to swarm all over the land and laying it to waste.

Exodus 8:24

Then the Lord did so. And there came great swarms of insects into the house of Pharaoh and the houses of his servants and the land was laid waste because of the swarms of insects in all the land of Egypt.

Again, Pharaoh said he would let the people go (v. 28). And again, he did not (v. 32). There seemed to be some movement, but the end had not come. Then God inflicted a severe pestilence on the livestock of Egypt, causing all the livestock to die (Exod. 9:6). Next we see God causing boils to break out on man and beast throughout the land.

Exodus 9:8-11

8 Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh.

9 "It will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt."

10 So they took soot from a kiln, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses threw it toward the sky, and it became boils breaking out with sores on man and beast.

11 The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians.

Even Pharaoh's magicians were afflicted with boils. This clear demonstration of God's power and sovereignty would surely be an encouragement to God's people that at last Pharaoh would let them go. However, the struggle was not over.

Why difficulties prolonged

The question may be raised: Why did God's people have to go through so many rounds of confrontation? Couldn't God have delivered them in a single stroke? Sometimes we do not understand why God does things in a certain way. We may not understand what is happening while in the midst of it, though we may after the event is over. And there are some situations that we will not be able to understand until we meet the Lord. Whatever the case may be, we cannot allow such situations to shake our faith, hinder us from fighting the good fight of faith, or in any way adversely affect our walk with God. If we do, we fall into the design of the evil one. Though there are some issues we will not fully understand, we have to continue to trust God on the basis of our knowledge of Him – that He is a good and faithful God.

The Book of Exodus reveals to us that God had good reasons for bringing the Israelites through the many rounds of confrontation. These confrontations did not take place in vain. This is what the Lord said to Pharaoh through Moses:

Exodus 9:15-16

15 "For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth.

16 "But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.

God said He could have cut off Pharaoh and the Egyptians from the earth in a single stroke. If He had done so, the Israelites would have been instantly delivered. But God said He had a purpose for the many rounds of confrontation. He did it this way to demonstrate to Pharaoh His great might and to proclaim His name through all the earth (v. 16). He also did it for the sake of the Israelites, to show them that despite the formidable and obstinate monarch they were up against, God was able to subdue him. God could deliver His people from slavery. God's deliverance clearly demonstrates His power and greatness. It also demonstrates His goodness and love towards His people. This is one of the most significant events in the history of God's people, one which the people of Israel still look back to. It shows them that the God they worship is One who could bring about a wonderful deliverance, and One to whom nothing is impossible. This is the purpose to which Exodus 10:2 points.

Exodus 10:2

and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the Lord."

This is the purpose that God desired to accomplish: "that you may know that I am the Lord". The many rounds of battle helped to bring across this important truth in a very powerful way.

Sometimes God allows us to go through prolonged difficulties because there are precious lessons He desires us to learn. If we are discerning, we may be able, even when we are in the midst of it, to appreciate why God desires us to face the long-drawn-out battle.

But whether or not we understand what we are going through, God has His purposes. As for God's deliverance of the Israelites, God desires that this event would be a lesson not only for the people at that time, but also for generations to come – "that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson". And indeed the Exodus is a momentous event that has significant effects right through the centuries – not only for the Israelites, but also for the church. Throughout the history of the church, believers constantly draw encouragement from this event.

Coming back to the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, we see that the rounds of confrontation continued. In Exodus 9:23, we see thunder, hail and fire. In Exodus 10:14, we see swarms of locusts coming over the whole land of Egypt, more numerous than on any previous occasion. After that, an intense darkness fell over the land of Egypt for three days (Exod. 10:21-22). With that, we see God's hour approaching.

Persevere in faith to the end

As chapter 11 tells us, there would be one more plague.

Exodus 11:1

Now the Lord said to Moses, "One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; after that he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out from here completely.

However, even when the end was near, the situation was still very tense, difficult and dangerous. Just before God's announcement of the final plague, we see Pharaoh in a defiant mood.

Exodus 10:28

Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!"

Pharaoh remained stubborn and unyielding. Even with the miracle of thick darkness that lasted three days, Pharaoh still refused to budge. Not only that, he told Moses: "Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!" It was God who had instructed Moses to confront Pharaoh. If Moses could not see Pharaoh's face anymore, how could the task be accomplished? Moses had already gone through many rounds of confrontation with Pharaoh. Each time Pharaoh made a promise that he would let the people go, he changed his mind. Things had been difficult and discouraging enough for Moses. The tension mounted when Pharaoh threatened to kill him if he were to appear before him again. Interestingly, Pharaoh uttered these fiercely threatening words to Moses just before the Lord assured Moses

deliverance was about to take place. There is a principle in spiritual warfare reflected here. Sometimes when the battle is about to be won, the evil one may put up one last fight. It is important not to waver and give up the fight at this point; otherwise the battle will be lost.

The last plague finally came, resulting in the death of all the firstborn in Egypt (but the sons of Israel were spared). After that, Pharaoh did let the people go. But he again changed his mind and ordered his army to pursue the fleeing Israelites. However, God continued to watch over the Israelites and led His people safely through the Red Sea.

Lessons

I would like to bring together some lessons we could learn from this account in the Book of Exodus.

We see that underlying this whole series of events is God's purposes for His people. We also see that throughout these events, the battle was the Lord's. As we seek to live for the Lord, we should be conscious that ultimately, God has a purpose to fulfil. He is building His kingdom, and He will vindicate His name. Our part is to cooperate with the Lord in faith and persevere in the work He has entrusted to us. Hebrews 10:36 reminds us of the importance of endurance.

Hebrews 10:36

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

We must not shrink back when we meet with difficulties. If we do, the Lord will not have pleasure in us (Heb. 10:38). When we recognise the Lord's will, we must persevere in it however difficult it may be. We must maintain the spiritual vigilance and exertion needful to fight the good fight of faith. We must not grow weary and become discouraged when the intensity increases and the difficulties multiply, seemingly without end. Be patient, for the Lord has a purpose. At the right time, God will bring His purposes to pass and the battle to a successful completion.

Although there were many rounds in the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh, things were not just going round and round in circles without progression. There was definite progression towards ultimate victory.

How well Moses and the Israelites went through the various rounds of confrontation with Pharaoh would make a difference to how things develop. God had much to teach them in the process. It was important that they learn well. If they did, their relationship with God and their character would develop and they would be more equipped to face what lay ahead.

At every stage, we have to actively look to the Lord and work out His will together with Him. We should not adopt the attitude: The battle is the Lord's; He will fight it – and we just let things be.

We should cooperate with Him, and that can take various forms. At times, we cooperate through active involvement. At other times, we cooperate mainly through prayer. In our service to the Lord, spiritual warfare is to be expected. Let us do our part well so that things may turn out well.

Many things have gone wrong in church history because God's people have been lacking in faithfulness, in intensity, in perseverance. As a result, God's people have failed to accomplish many aspects of the will of God.

God will accomplish some aspects of His will without man's cooperation. When He says: "Let there be light", there will be light. When He says, "The Lord Jesus will come again", He will come again, whatever man may say or do, and whether or not man cooperates.

But there are many things in God's will where man's cooperation will affect the outcome. How well man fulfils his part and works together with God will have a bearing on the outcome. In His graciousness, God may intervene and execute His plans in spite of our failures. But there are also many things that are not accomplished because of man's failure.

As we encounter a difficult situation, the important question to ask is not how long it will last. The important question is: Are we on the right track and are we being faithful? The real issues are: How much have we learnt while going through the difficult situation? How much has been accomplished for God's kingdom through the whole event? These are the more important questions to ask. We should not be preoccupied with how long the battle is. Of course, some things are better not prolonged. In such circumstances, we can pray that the Lord will not delay, that He will act speedily. But some things will take time. It could be days, months or even years before we see a resolution.

If we are determined to stay faithful to the Lord, we will be involved in spiritual warfare throughout our time on earth. The battles will come, one after another. There will be specific things and issues we have to deal with, and some of these can be very difficult and prolonged.

As for the people of Israel, after the long-drawn-out confrontation with Pharaoh, they were finally delivered from Egypt. But it did not end there. After their deliverance, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years before they entered the Promised Land. And after they had entered the Promised Land, there were still many battles they had to fight in the land of Canaan.

As for us, we know our whole life will be a series of spiritual battles. So if we have the proper perspective, we will be more concerned about how faithful we are, rather than how long a specific battle will last. If we are faithful, and if we cooperate with the Lord, the battle will not end later than it should.

In our walk with God, we will face many struggles. If we are faithful, victory is certain because the victory has already been won by the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. And we are claiming this victory and working it out day by day. We can have deep assurance and a strong sense of purpose and direction in life. Our life will not be a long and meaningless struggle.

As we work together with the Lord, He will encourage us and strengthen us. We will deepen in our fellowship with Him and with the brethren in church life. He will lead us into an ever-increasing appreciation and understanding of who He is and of the realities in the spiritual realm. He will help us nurture our spiritual growth and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit, leading to more vibrant expressions of body-life. This is at the heart of God's purposes.

And so, as we go through the various struggles in life, as we fight the battles that confront us, both in our own lives and in the outworking of church life, let us constantly remind ourselves of these major principles and the proper perspective. Let us not be like the Israelites, who failed the Lord so glaringly in so many ways. Let us not in one moment, express belief in God and in the next, grow weary and grumble. Let us not fail, for the consequences are serious. Instead, let us persevere in faith, working together with God.

Question for Reflection and Discussion

Reflect on how God delivered the children of Israel from Egypt. What lessons in the life of faith do you think God was seeking to teach the Israelites? What lessons can we draw for our own lives?

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