

## *Commission or Circumstance? • Exodus 6:10–30*

June 5, 1944 was the eve of one of history's great and memorable dates. But that day itself, the fifth of June, was for Dwight David Eisenhower a day of significance and a day of awesome decision.

Months of preparation had gone into the upcoming invasion of continental Europe at Normandy and what was to be called D-day. Months of preparation that came to the point of a decision that seemed to be determined by the weather. The weather over the English Channel on the third and the fourth and the fifth of June was overcast, stormy and rainy. It was impossible to determine the outcome of an invasion.

On the fifth of June a decision had to be made on whether or not to go on the next day. The logistics of it all were awesome. The statisticians of history tell us that ready and waiting for the invasion were 326,547 men. They took with them over 54,000 vehicles and in excess of 104,000 tons of supplies.

There was uncertainty as to whether or not the invasion should take place on June 6. A delay would probably be far more than the delay of a day as they would regroup for a later date of invasion.

The advisors conflicted in their advice. There were those who said, "Everything is ready. Even if the weather is not right, we have to go." And there were others who said, "That will be suicidal. It will not only cost the lives of tens of or hundreds of thousands of men, but it could turn the course of the war in a way that the German forces will win."

The final decision fell upon one man, General of the Army and Supreme Allied Commander Dwight David Eisenhower. They say that he heard all of the arguments in that English briefing room and then walked away from the table. Standing at the window and looking outside at the rain and the clouds, he weighed all of the arguments surrounding his mission of setting free Europe from the access powers and all the circumstances which were bearing down upon him. Finally, turning back to the quietly waiting colleagues, he said, "We go."

And so the invasion began.

It was on the next day, June 6, that he broadcast:

*People of Western Europe, a landing was made this morning on the coast of France by the troops of the allied expeditionary force. This landing is part of the concerted United Nations plan for the liberation of Europe made in conjunction with our great Russian allies. I call upon all who love freedom to stand with us now. Together we shall achieve victory.*

Eisenhower's decision was a weighing between a mission to liberate Europe and the circumstances of the weather that seemed to precipitate against the invasion that was planned.

Now in obviously different situations, it seems to me that we, in life, face the same type of awesome decisions. For we as Christians must decide whether our lives will be ruled by the divine commission of what we are supposed to do in life or the human circumstances which often seem to precipitate against our doing what we are supposed to do.

That's true for us and it's well illustrated in the story found in Exodus 6. In Moses' case and in our case it begins with that divine commission. Follow along in verses 10 and 11. It is there that the Mosaic terms of this divine commission are stated. "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country.'"

Over and over again God said the same thing to Moses. You would think that it only should have to be stated once. After all, this is God speaking. Yahweh. The covenant God. The great

God of commitment and relationship. The God of miracles and amazing revelation. You'd think that he would just have to say, "Moses, do it!" and never repeat it again.

But life isn't like that, is it? We sinful humans often don't listen very well when God first speaks to us. And even if we do listen, that does not mean that we quickly obey. And even when we do obey, it does not mean that we obey the first time we hear.

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So one more time God speaks his clear commission to Moses. “Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country.”

But we’re not so concerned about Moses. Is not our modern commission as Christians equally clear, perhaps even more so? Has not the same God, Yahweh, told us how we are to live and what we are to do? Are we not told repeatedly in each of the gospels, and then reinforced in the rest of the New Testament, that we are to go and make disciples of all nations? We are commissioned to set people free - not three million Hebrews, but in excess of three billion men and women and boys and girls around the world. We have heard it so often that perhaps we have become somewhat immune to the declaration of Yahweh.

This is important. We’re talking about what God wants to do with our lives. We’re talking about how our lives count at the end of their journey. This is what life is all about. And you would think that we should only need to hear it once. After all, if God says it, that should be it. But we often do not listen. And when we listen, we often do not obey. And when we obey, we do not always do so the first time.

Why is that? Why is it that God tells us what to do and we just don’t do it? Or, if we do obey, we’re so slow and inadequate about the task. When you get right down to it, my guess is that it isn’t because we don’t want to. It isn’t because we don’t care. Those of us who acknowledge that God is important want to serve him and please him. But we have circumstances that seem to precipitate against our fulfillment of the divine commission from God.

And so did Moses. As we read on in verse 12, it says, “But Moses said to the LORD, ‘If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me...?’” The circumstance was failure. He said what he was supposed to say and they would not listen.

For the second time in his life, Moses had failed and he was hurt. He took it personally when the people of God did not listen to him. He did not interpret it that they did not listen to God. In his mind, they did not listen to Moses. And because he had failed, he wanted to quit. Moses was ready to allow the lack of listening from the people to outweigh the commission from God.

I’ve done that. I’m not proud of it. I confess it as a weakness. There have been times when God has clearly established for me that I am to speak on his behalf. I have sat by someone on an airplane or had an opportunity in a restaurant or with a neighbor or a friend or a relative to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I have wanted to. In fact, I have blurted out with inadequate words some expression of faith only to find that I was not listened to. And, like Moses, I was hurt. Like Moses I took it personally. Like Moses I assumed that it was me that they would not listen to when it was really God that they would not listen to. Like Moses, I have allowed my human failure to outweigh God’s divine commission.

But I’m not alone. Almost all of us could share the same testimony. I have seen Sunday School teachers who sense the divine commission to share God’s truth with children or adults. They have worked hard, been enthusiastic about it, shared what was on their hearts, but the people did not listen. And they were so impressed with the circumstance of that particular failure that it outweighed the divine commission, and they quit.

I know people who have believed that their marriages were commissioned by God, and then their marriages have run amuck. Initially they have said, “I believe God wants me to try to fix up this marriage, to bring it back together again.” Only to find that she would not listen, that he would not pay attention. And then the overwhelming sense of failure has overshadowed a divine commission to pursue to the last possible resort the healing of that marriage.

We know what Moses was up against because we have been there, too. The circumstance of failure seems to loom so large, like a massive cloud above us, that it completely dims out the bright and otherwise penetrating light of the divine commission of what God has called us to do.

It was not just failure, but also fear. We find that the circumstance of failure leads to the circumstance of fear when Moses says to God in verse 12, “If the Israelites will not listen to men, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?”

Now you know what Moses is doing here. One thing goes wrong and he begins to extrapolate that out to everything going wrong. What he does is

switches to worry mode. And it's then that we make everything bigger and worse than it possibly otherwise could be.

Moses thinks, "I'm a Hebrew. I'm a Jew, and my job is to tell Pharaoh to set the people free. But I don't talk very well. I'm inarticulate. I'm an unworthy representative of God. I can't even persuade my own fellow Hebrews. And if they won't listen to me, Pharaoh will never listen to me. And if he won't listen to me, well, if things are bad now, they're only going to get worse. If he has brought down a terrible burden upon the slaves, he's going to make it an impossible burden. If he's going to beat them now, he's going to kill them later. The whole nation is going to die. And they're going to despise me. They're going to blame me. God is going to be angry with me. Everything is going to go wrong. Freedom will never come."

We've done that. When something goes wrong in our lives, we tend to extrapolate it out and say that this little fear is going to turn into tomorrow's despair and disaster. And that can be catastrophic in our Christian lives. We have been commissioned by God to live for Jesus Christ. We have been commissioned to share him and his gospel with other people. But that eternal commission is set aside when we allow every day fears to take over our lives. Fear and worry cause us to become self-centered and spiritually paralyzed and incapable and unwilling to fulfill the commission to which God has called us.

For Moses it was failure, it was fear and, in verses 14 to 25, it seems to be family as well. In the middle of this great epic story of the setting of God's people free, we find twelve verses devoted to the heads of Moses' family. I find it fascinating that they aren't all Hebrew names. In verse 16, Merari, and in verse 25, Putiel, are Egyptian names.

Now keep in mind that

God's plan for his chosen people was that they be different and separate from the pagan nations. But they were Egyptian names in Moses' family. That's got to say several things. At least it says that Moses' relatives liked Egyptian culture and names so much that they gave their children Egyptian names. But

that may be an awfully conservative interpretation.

Closer to the truth is that they were intermarrying with the Egyptians, and that raises all kinds of questions. Where were the loyalties? Which gods did they worship? What about later on in the book of Exodus when the angel of death comes through as the last plague and strikes dead every eldest child in the families of the Egyptians but passes over the families of the Hebrews? What if the family was half Hebrew and half Egyptian? Did that child live or die? What about when they actually made the exodus? It's one thing if everybody you know is leaving and all your relatives are going with you. But there were some families where the relatives were all Egyptians, and they weren't coming along. There must have been families that said, "Are you coming with me or not?" And a husband stayed behind, or a wife, and the families were split apart by the move. And there must have been harsh arguing and disagreement and the tearing apart of relationships, all in the family of Moses.

In verse 25 it says that Aaron's son married a daughter of Putiel. That's an interesting Egyptian word which literally, when translated, means Ethiopian black man. So in the immediate family of Moses there was an international, interfaith and interracial marriage.

Or in verse 20 where we are told that Amram married his paternal aunt. Later on in the book of Exodus, God reveals and Moses declares in the law that that type of a marriage is illegal. It is deemed under God's law to be an incestuous relationship in the nation of Israel. And yet Moses' own family, Moses' own parents, were guilty of breaking that law which Moses later declares from God's revelation.

In verse 23 there is just a passing reference to these two men, Nadab and Abihu. We aren't told much about them because the fam-

ily wasn't real proud of those guys. You see they did not correctly handle the worship of God, and God had to strike them dead with a holy fire.

Why are all these stories here in the middle of the epic story of God's redemption of his chosen people? Well, all of this is to say that everybody's

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life is filled with the functions of family. The issues may be different. But everybody has issues. Some are marriages to persons that the family would not choose. Perhaps it's an issue with parents or children. Maybe the issue is one of spirituality or breaking the rules.

Often, when we hear of people like Moses and Aaron and the other great spiritual leaders of days gone by, we tend to idealize them. We pull them out of the context in which they must have lived. We don't think in terms of whether Moses, on the day before he went up on Mt. Sinai, had an argument with his wife, or whether there was some ordinary problem that was getting him down and he was, as a result, depressed by it.

Rather, we think of them as living independent of all the circumstances of life that are, in fact, the realities with which they lived as all people live. The question is whether we allow these circumstances of failure or fear or family to detract from the primary purposes of life.

The story goes on in verse 26. And I'm intrigued by this verse. For there we read, "It was this same Aaron and Moses to whom God said...." The readers of this book knew who they were. They knew who Moses was. They knew who Aaron was. These were the two that failed. These were the two that had fears. These two had the family with all the intrigues of relationship and all of the strange names.

These were the ones like us, with circumstances like ours. These were the ones to whom God spoke in the midst of their circumstances. And what did God say? Look again at verse 26: "Bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions." And in verse 30, "Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you."

God just won't give up. He just won't quit. He keeps pushing and pushing. Because he wants Moses' life to be what Moses' life is suppose to be. He wants it to count. He wants the commission

fulfilled, and he will not back off.

But what good does it do?

Look how the chapter ends in verse 30. "But Moses said to the LORD, 'Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?'" Does that sound familiar? We've heard that over and over and over again as well. Moses keeps coming up with the same excuse. Until in reading the story we begin to wonder if there is any hope for this guy at all. Do you think he'll ever change? Do you think he'll ever do what God wants him to do? Do you think he will ever be able to do what God has commissioned him to do? Or do you think that he's so set in his ways that he will always allow the ordinary circumstances of life to overrule the commission from God? We'll have to wait until chapter 7 to find out more about Moses.

But what about you? How will you decide? What's going to rule your life? The very real circumstances of fear and failure and family and all the other circumstances of life, or the divine commission of God himself who wants your life to count? The answer to that need not wait for another time. The answer to that is ours to tell God today.

And so our Father, we acknowledge the reality of the press of the circumstances that are ours. But we pray that, by your spirit, we will be able to live with the divine commission overruling the human circumstances so that our lives truly may count for you and for eternity. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

*Faith Matters* is the Broadcast Ministry of  
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
952-944-6300  
[www.wooddale.org](http://www.wooddale.org)  
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