

Christianity Today

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[0 : 00] Well, it's amazing how quickly Christianity has lost its place in society that it once had as the good guys.

I don't know if you've noticed that, but Christianity doesn't seem to be the good guys anymore. In fact, in his book called *Being the Bad Guys*, Christian author Steve McAlpine observes that within the last century, sort of from the beginning of the 20th century, the 1900s, Christianity has actually moved in the perception of society.

They used to be the good guys. They used to be the moral compass of society where people would know, even if they weren't Christians and they didn't go to church, they would know that the Christians are the people you listen to if you want to know what's right and what's wrong.

You know, that's what church is in society for. That's what Christianity used to be at the turn of the 20th century. But then it changed. Over the course of the 20th century, it changed from that being the moral compass of society to being, you know, just one of the many options of what to believe. Take it or leave it. You know, it's one of many voices out there. But it's moved then even further since that, he observes. In the last few decades, Christianity has actually started to be seen as a threat to society, as an obstacle to the progress of the sexual freedom and other progressions of society.

[1 : 27] So Christianity is starting to be seen as the thing that people need to get rid of if society is going to move forward, as can be observed, for example, in this picture. That's a picture of a Christian preacher being arrested not long ago in London.

London used to be, you know, one of the centers of Christianity. But today, this guy arrested by the police being handcuffed there and taken off to jail for doing what?

What was his crime? Just reading what the Bible says. Preaching what the Bible says. Nothing more than opening and reading the Bible to people.

Christianity is starting to be seen as the bad guys, as an obstacle to society. And we're quickly needing to learn. Maybe you found this in your workplace, amongst your friends, definitely on social media.

We're quickly needing to learn how to live in a world that sees us as the bad guys. Well, that is one of the many things that the book of Exodus helps us to do.

[2 : 29] Because this situation is not new. In fact, it's the exact same situation the children of Abraham found themselves in at the beginning of Exodus.

Now, a few years ago, we looked through the book of Genesis. We studied that together. And so, if you were here for that, you'll remember who the children of Abraham were. They weren't just any group of people.

They were a family that God has chosen, especially out of the nations. God chose the family of Abraham as the family through whom he's going to carry forward his plans for this whole world. Through whom, eventually, as we read the Bible onwards, this is the nation that the Messiah, the Son of God, is going to come through. And through whom God is going to gather, the Messiah is going to gather people from every nation to himself.

And eventually, ultimately, that God is going to undo the curse, the problems with this world. And it all started with this group of people, the children of Abraham.

[3 : 29] Abraham. And at the end of Genesis, they find themselves in Egypt. And they were living it up. They were enjoying themselves. Egypt was a good place to be. It was, you know, on the banks of the Nile.

It was a fruitful country. It was one of the world's superpowers, if not at the time, the world's superpower. It was a good place to live. There were all the luxuries of modern life in Egypt.

And they were settled there. And they were liked. The Egyptians liked having them around. They were the good guys. In fact, one of their ancestors, Joseph, was a national hero. The ex-prime minister of Egypt. He had saved Egypt from a major famine. And so they liked having the Israelites around. They were a benefit to society. But that didn't last. And so as we start Exodus, we see that that situation was temporary. So have a look with me from verse 8 in Exodus chapter 1.

[4 : 30] Now, a new king who did not know about Joseph came to power in Egypt. He said to his people, look, the Israelite people are more numerous and powerful than we are.

Come, let's deal shrewdly with them. Otherwise, they will multiply further. And when war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and leave the country. And so it didn't take long. It was, in fact, just the rule of one king to change the perception that the Egyptian society had towards the Israelites, the children of Abraham.

It didn't take long for them to be seen initially as friends to them being seen as a very real threat to national security. But this was always going to happen.

In fact, God had warned his people in Genesis. He'd warned Abraham that this was going to happen. This was inevitable. Because this was God's people carrying out God's project, serving God's plans in the midst of a society that didn't.

[5 : 42] And so there was always going to be a problem. And whenever that happens, both then and today, whenever God's people are in the world, living out and fulfilling God's purposes in the midst of a society that doesn't, two things are going to happen that we see in this story.

Two inevitable outcomes. Firstly, God's people will always, sooner or later, be opposed by the society around them.

Let's read again from verse 10. Come, let's deal shrewdly with them, Pharaoh is saying. Otherwise they will multiply further, and when war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and leave the country.

So, the Egyptians assigned taskmasters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor. They built Pithom and Ramses as supply cities for Pharaoh.

But the more they oppressed them, the more they multiplied and spread so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. They worked the Israelites ruthlessly and made their lives bitter with difficult labor and brick and mortar and all kinds of fieldwork.

[6 : 52] They ruthlessly imposed all this work on them. And it gets worse as we go on. The escalation of this opposition against the Israelites.

Now, on the surface, it's political. The reason that Pharaoh is opposing these people is because they're a threat to national security. They're growing, they're foreigners, and he's worried about what kind of influence they'll be able to have in Egypt.

And so, it's a practical, political move Pharaoh makes to make sure Israel doesn't get too powerful. But there are also hints that something deeper is at play.

Look again at the wording that Pharaoh uses in verse 10. This is one of the ways Hebrew authors draw our attention and connect us back to things that happened before. The particular wording he uses here in verse 10.

And see if it reminds you of any time before that you've heard similar words used. He says, Come, let's deal shrewdly with them, otherwise they will multiply further.

[8 : 00] This wording, this phrasing, has an uncanny resemblance, scholars have pointed out, to what happened at the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11.

If you were with us in Genesis, you'll remember that. It was a key event in explaining why the world is like it is today. Because at the Tower of Babel, that was the point at which the first major time that humanity rejected God's project for the world in favor of their own.

But when they did that, when they rebelled against God's purposes, God's project to pursue their own, they used very similar words. Genesis 11, you don't have to turn there, I'll just read to you. They said, Come, let us build ourselves a city with its tower in the sky and make a name for ourselves. Otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth.

Come, let us do this. This is what's happening. Come, together, let us do this. Otherwise, this will happen. And this movement against God's plan to pursue their own is something that's also happening here in Exodus.

[9 : 06] And you see it as the story continues. You see that the resistance against the people of God is not just practical and political. There's something deeper going on. Because in the same way as in Babel, this opposition to God's chosen people in Egypt is driven by the same spirit of rebellion against God's project.

Against what God is doing. And that is why God's people in every age will always, sooner or later, end up being the bad guys.

Because fallen society is hardwired to resist God and His plans for this world. Fallen humanity. Unless we have the Holy Spirit coming and transforming us, we are hardwired to resist what God is doing in His world.

Humanity is hardwired to resist God even if they don't know it. It is instinctive. It's like a dog's instinct. I don't know if you take your dog, if you have a dog, take him for a walk.

I take my dog for a walk to Limply Road Park from time to time. And he's a really chilled dog. He's happy. He's just social. He wants to see people, sniff people, sniff dogs, just play.

[10 : 25] He's a happy dog. And he's wagging his tail as I'm walking him. And he's just enjoying the day until he sees a squirrel. When he sees a squirrel, something clicks in his brain.

There's a little switch that puts him into hunting mode. And it's not often that you see this, but he goes into hunting mode. He focuses and he wants to kill this squirrel.

And he doesn't know why. He just wants to kill this squirrel because it's instinctive. It's hardwired into him. Well, the Bible teaches us that sinful humanity also has instinctive reactions to things. It's instinctive for us to sin. It's instinctive for us to not want what God wants. And it's instinctive for humanity to oppose God's project in the world and therefore to oppose whoever God is working through.

So whoever God is carrying out in any stage of history, whether it's the children of Abraham, the nation of Israel, or the church today, whoever God at that stage in history is carrying out his project for the world through, humanity will instinctively oppose.

[11 : 39] It's always going to happen. And that is why when the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the young minister Timothy, training him and warning him for the challenges ahead in ministry, he said to him these words, 2 Timothy 3 verse 12.

He says, in fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Now, godly life here doesn't just mean being a nice person.

You know, who's going to persecute you for being a nice person? Living a godly life in Christ Jesus means when you subscribe to God's agenda for this world by following Jesus Christ, his son.

That's living a godly life in Christ Jesus. And when we do that, sooner or later, we will be opposed for it by a world that doesn't follow Jesus.

And so don't be surprised. When you look around in society and you see all this opposition to Christian values, when you're on social media and you see promotion of unbiblical things and suppression of Christianity and Christian voices, don't be surprised.

[12 : 56] Don't despair. Don't get depressed. Because it's inevitable. The Bible tells us it's an inevitable result of people who serve God's plans living in a world that doesn't.

And so expect it. And don't be surprised when it happens. It's inevitable. That's the first inevitable result of when God's people live in a world that doesn't follow him.

But there's another inevitable result of when God's people are willing to live in a world that has rebelled against him. And that is that God's project will always proceed.

Because he works through his people who are willing to live in a world that is opposed to them.

Every time they're willing to do that, God will proceed with his plans. Look, for example, in this story again, Exodus 1. I want you to notice a detail. Exodus 1 verse 12.

[13 : 55] Have a look in your Bibles. So, Pharaoh is now worried about the expansion of the Israelites. And so he starts to take measures to stop them expanding.

And then verse 12. But the more they oppressed them, the more they multiplied. The more they oppressed them, the more they multiplied.

At this point in history, God's plan required the growth of Abraham's children. That's the main thing that needed to happen at this stage in the plan.

Of course, the rest of the Bible outlines how God fulfills his promises to Abraham through Israel and then through the church. But at this point in history, what God was doing is that he was expanding the nation of the Israelites, the children of Abraham.

That's what he was doing. That's what his project required. And that's why, you'll notice, the more Pharaoh tries to stop that, the more it happens. It's like taking a stain out of your shirt.

[15:03] I don't know if you've been in a fancy... I've been in this situation where I was in a fancy do. And then I've got a stain on my shirt. You know what you do, instinctive thing, when you get a stain on your shirt is like...

You know, you don't let anybody see. You try to rub it out. Well, what happens when you try to rub out the stain? It gets worse, right? It gets bigger. And then you're just like, oh my goodness, I can't get it out.

Well, that's frustrating, isn't it? It's a frustrating situation. When you're trying to get rid of something and your action to get rid of it actually makes it bigger. Well, that experience of frustration is repeatedly the experience of anybody who tries to oppose God's work in God's world.

They'll just get frustrated and more angry as Pharaoh did. Because God seems to enjoy using opposition to His plans in order to carry out His plans.

He does it over and over again in the Bible. It's almost comical. How He waits. He waits for people to oppose His plans. And then He turns around their efforts to make His plans go forward.

[16:07] I mean, the ultimate example is in the death of Jesus, isn't it? When Jesus, the Messiah, the long-awaited Messiah came to put all of God's long-awaited plans into motion on earth.

What happened? His enemies mobilized. Both supernatural and natural enemies mobilized to destroy Him. Because this was threat number one. For, you know, Satan and the forces of evil and the people who wanted to rule their own lives.

This was enemy number one. This was target number one. When He came to earth, they did everything they could to destroy Him. To stop Him fulfilling His mission to take the throne.

And when He was hanging on the cross, they were rubbing their hands in glee. They were going, whew. That was a close one. But we eventually won. We got Him. They didn't know what was going to happen three days later.

They didn't know that God had planned that their opposition, them taking Jesus out and getting Him to die on the cross, was actually a key event in God's plan to save people from every nation, to make salvation and the forgiveness of sins available to all people, to bring about His global church, to spread the gospel of Jesus throughout the world.

[17:32] And we've been doing that for 2,000 years. And nobody's been able to stop us. Much as they've tried. And the more that the church is oppressed, you know what happens?

The more the gospel goes out. Doesn't it? In Acts chapter 8, for example, this came to me when I was looking at what was happening to the Israelites here.

The same thing happened to the early church. Let me read to you from Acts chapter 8, verse 1.

This is just after the stoning of Stephen. This is the first Christian martyr.

This is the first time murderous violent oppression has broken out against the church. And we read this. It looks like a really bad situation for the church. Acts 8, verse 1. On that day, a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem.

This was just a small, fragile church. It's a great threat now that this severe persecution is breaking out against them. And all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria.

[18:34] It looks like the church is in real trouble. God's project is in real trouble. But we read just a few verses later. So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word.

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. The crowds were all paying attention to what Philip said. And they listened and there was great joy.

In that city. See what happened there? The more opposition the people of God faced and the project of God in the world faced, the more God carried it out.

It's inevitable. And so we don't need to despair. Because, yes, while it's inevitable that God's project will face opposition, and it will be hard to be involved in it, it's just as inevitable that it will succeed.

In spite of that opposition. And so be encouraged. Be encouraged as a Christian, as you get involved in kingdom work, that it will be hard.

[19:41] There will be people who don't like it. You will face opposition. Society will try to shut you down. But God will succeed, and he will use what we do as the church to save people in preparation for the return of Christ.

God will do what he set out to do through us, no matter how hard it is. So be encouraged. I mean, I don't know about you, but that's encouraging to me. That's encouraging to me when I look around. There's a society that wants to shut us down. And a society that at every point is attacking our values. And where we've got to be more and more careful what we say and how we say it. It seems so discouraging, but we must be encouraged that God, and we see it in the story in Exodus, God will not stop fulfilling his plans in and through us.

Those are inevitable things. There will be opposition. God will succeed in carrying forward his project despite that opposition. But what's not inevitable is how you personally, as a Christian, will respond when you're opposed for what you believe.

[20 : 51] And it will happen. And it's happening more and more. Not just out there, street preachers in London, but more in offices, in schools. It's getting closer and closer to each one of us, this opposition that we face in our culture today.

How are you going to respond when it comes to you? And will you fear God more than you fear people? Because that's where this story takes us, and it actually challenges us to look at ourselves. Read with me from verse 15. Look what happens. From verse 15, Exodus 1. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, the first whose name was Shipra, and the second whose name was Pua, when you help the Hebrew woman give birth, observe them as they deliver.

If the child is a son, kill him. But if it's a daughter, she may live. Now just pause there. We need to understand what's going on here. We need to get this scene into our head.

The most powerful man in the world at that time, the king of Egypt, the superpower, has called two maids and given them a direct order.

[22 : 08] This is like the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, or the U.S. president. What's his name? Biden. I know the Chinese president before I know the U.S. president.

That's weird. It shows you where the world is going. Anyway, it's like them with their entourage of federal agents and their dark SUVs all rocking up outside a little house of two maids and going in there and giving them a direct order.

What are you going to do? You listen, you know? That's powerful people telling you what to do. But look what they did. Verse 17. The midwives, however, feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had told them to do.

They let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, Why have you done this and let the boys live?

The midwives said to Pharaoh, Well, the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. They are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them. So God was good to the midwives.

[23 : 20] And the people multiplied and became very numerous. Since the midwives feared God, he gave them families. And so here, even though Pharaoh doesn't give up and he keeps on escalating his opposition, it's here that we're introduced to the unlikely heroines of the story.

These lowly Hebrew midwives who are under a state pressure to perform mandatory abortions.

That's what's going on here. Pharaoh has ordered them state-sanctioned mandatory abortions. But they disobey. And then they're called in.

And you can imagine the scene again. Maybe called into Pharaoh's palace. These armed guards around them. Pharaoh in all his glory looks at them.

Why did you disobey me? What do they do? They come up with the best excuse they can think of. Kind of a little white lie. Well, you know, we can't get there in time.

[24 : 22] The Hebrew midwives, they just give birth too quickly. Now, maybe the reason is because they were really slow deliberately to get to the Hebrew midwives. Whatever it is. And even though they kind of bent the truth here, it's not that God commends them for what they say and how they get out of the sticky situation.

What God commends them for in this story is what they did. And it's in verse 17. They feared God. And did not do as the king of Egypt had told them.

They feared God more than they feared the power of Egypt. And to fear God in this situation. It means despite the intimidating powers pressing upon them from all sides, they put what God wanted before what the powers of Egypt wanted because they would still rather be on the wrong side of Pharaoh than on the wrong side of God.

That's what it means to fear God. The question that each one of us must answer for ourselves is will we be brave enough to do the same when crunch time comes?

Because it's always safer to do what the world wants than what God wants, isn't it? More and more so today. You want to be safe? You do what the world wants. You do what society is pressuring you to do.

[25 : 40] Then you'll be one of the guys. You'll be safe. You'll avoid trouble. You'll keep your head low. It's always safer to do what the world wants than what God wants. As we've seen in recent situations.

For example, Dr. David Macareth in the UK losing his job because as a God-fearing Christian, he insisted on referring to people by their God-given genders, which is what God wanted.

Or closer to home, Dr. Jacques de Foss in South Africa, who was taken to the United States court after warning a patient that abortion actually does kill a human being. These are examples of Christians who fear God.

And they put what God wants ahead of what society is pressuring them to do and say. And they pay the price for it. Will you do the same? Will you do the same? When the pressure lands on you?

When your school demands that you agree with things that God doesn't? When your office pressures you to put together a promotion to promote LGBTQ?

[26 : 48] Will you also, in those situations, be willing to put what God wants ahead of the powers of the world and what they're pressuring you to do and say?

Will you, when the rubber hits the road, when it's crunch time, when it comes to your life, will you do what these Hebrew midwives did? Will you fear God more than people?

Because we know who we serve as Christians. We know who God is. He's revealed himself to us. And we know what he wants in this world. It's quite clear. Far more.

We know far more than the Hebrew midwives did. You know, what they did is commendable because they hardly knew anything about God at this stage. All they knew was he was the God who had spoken to Abraham and you better just be on his side.

That's all they knew. But that was enough. We know so much more about God. He's revealed himself and his plans fully in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 49] We know that the whole earth belongs to him. And we know that he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice. By the man he has appointed and he has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

How much more? Knowing all that. Knowing God's end game. How much more should we be ready to do and say what our king wants more than what the world wants. Even if it offends the people around us.

Because I don't know about you. But I'd rather be on the wrong side of everyone else in the world than on the wrong side of Jesus Christ when he comes back in his glory.

Let's pray. Yes Lord we thank you for your word that reveals these truths to us that we grasp this morning. That the world is opposed to your people and your plans and yet you will succeed.

Ultimately when Jesus returns to put everything to rights. And Lord we thank you for this warning and this encouragement to be on the right side of Jesus.

[28 : 59] Even if the world hates us for it. Lord we pray that you would help us to take the example of the Hebrew midwives and their bravery to fear you.

That when we go out to the office, to the school, to the world around us. That we will be fearless to stand for Jesus and who he is and what he wants. And fear him rather than people.

And we pray this in his name. Amen.