

## “How to Abuse Your Neighbor and Destroy a Kingdom”

Exodus 1:8-22 (2:1-10)

Not many people like change; and sometimes even when we ask for change or agree to it, when the time comes for that change to occur, we are a little less agreeable.

In fact, given everything else being equal, most people avoid change, unless they are in charge of that change. Put them in charge, give them authority over the changes, and the same people who would resist change unceremoniously imposed upon them, by others, are quite likely to make changes at the cost and comfort of others.

I've got a silly example to share with you right now. Remember these important words “silly example”.

Most people here today, I think, know that I moved from Ontario to BC about 20 years ago. Before we moved, I enjoyed skiing on the ‘mountains’ of Ontario – Blue Mountain, Horseshoe Valley, Glen Eden, Chedoke Winter Sports Park, to name just a few. But the thought of moving to BC, with its ‘champagne’ powder and shorter lift lines, caused me to become just downright giddy, because I'd heard I could golf and ski the same day. That means that I could ski whenever others were golfing – just about every day of the year.

Yet when we got out here, the ski season seemed shorter than I had dreamed and I pined for a longer winter so that I could go skiing more.

Now, comes the really silly part of this example. Let's say that I am in charge of the weather, I will from time-to-time be able to override the natural patterns of temperature and water and wind velocity in the upper atmosphere so as to return winter again and again to the Lower Mainland.

One Sunday in early August, with a predicted heat wave approaching, I decide that I would like to go skiing, Monday on Grouse Mtn. and every day that week. So, without much consideration I said, "Heck, I have the power. I hold the remote. I'll change the channel. Let it snow tonight and every night this week but not during the day!" And, it happens that way. Just as in the beginning, God said, "Let there be light..." and "it was so," so I say, "Let it snow" and there will be snow that night and the runs at Grouse will be fantastic tomorrow and all week. My word will be fruitful, I will get what I want.

My speech will inseminate the air "making it bring forth" snow. I shall know myself to be as God. I will think it, I will speak it and I will know that it shall be exactly as I said it. "Snow, let it snow," I say. It does, and out I go skiing in mid-summer, loving every minute of it.

Left unchecked, wholly abandoned to my own "devices and desires," I begin to maximize my pleasure at the expense of my neighbor Victor. Now Victor, as it turns out, loves to golf, especially with the new set of golf clubs he received for Father's Day. Victor loves to go golfing every day possible, from early April to late October. So, what will Victor be able to do, when in the midst of a heat wave, I decide to have it snow nightly, so I can ski all week.

Now, before we go any further, I'd like to say a couple of words about when we first moved to BC. We arrived in late January and that first year we explored the Lower Mainland. But by the next February, when Scott came to visit during his reading week, we decided to go skiing at Whistler. The snow was beautiful, the lines were short and the runs were long, **really long**. The runs were longer than I had anticipated – the one run I got in, really tuckered me out, that's when I began to long for the mountains of Ontario.

This pattern of neighbourly abuse by means of thoughtlessly exercising our own will is evident everywhere; in our schools, in our families, in our churches, and in our communities. I have narrated a very silly example. Some will say that I have been needlessly detailed. So, I leave you to supply the many true and tragic examples of this same thoughtless pattern of neighborly abuse.

The scriptures say, "A new king arose over Egypt, [one] who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). And because he did not know Joseph, this new king began to change the relationship that had existed between the Egyptians and the Hebrews since Joseph's time. This new king feared them because they had ". . . become far too numerous for us." He stirred up fear among his people telling them that these Israelites will join with our enemies when war breaks out. To prevent this type of disaster from happening to his nation, he suggested to his people, that in the "national interest" of Egypt we must ". . . put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour . . ." and the Egyptians ". . . worked them ruthlessly."

The scriptures say, "A new king arose over Egypt, [one] who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). And as result slavery, torture, oppression, shanty-towns, sexual exploitation, and genocide all grew in Egypt. These are the bitter fruits of a human heart set on getting its own way, whatever the cost to his neighbors.

All I wanted was more snow; all he wanted was more land. I merely wanted a bit more of the good life; he wanted a lot more of the same. I only wanted to command the heavens; he sought to command an entire nation. Between my silly example and this new King, is there really so much difference?

The problem, as I see it, is not so much that the new king did not know Joseph. Of course, he did not. Many Egyptologists conclude from the evidence that this pharaoh was not Egyptian. Many think he was the first ruler of the Hyksos, a group of non-natives invaders who controlled Egypt in the sixteenth and seventeenth century before Jesus was born. Perhaps, perhaps not. In either case, the really significant problem then, and now, and always will be is the same. Pharaoh did not know God. His heart was unyielded to the one, true God, the God who set the sun in the heavens and started the Nile flowing. Pharaoh knew not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the true God whom Joseph served, the God whose promise to Abraham would not return "empty," the God, as it turns out, who controlled his destiny and that of his new kingdom.