

Don't Mess with the LORD
Exodus: The God Who Delivers Series
Exodus 7:1-8:32
Pastor Bryan Clark

Whether we're talking about your profession, your career, your job, your skills, or it could be playing a sport, could be learning a musical instrument, could be training a horse—whatever makes sense to you—there is a reality that you can only learn so much in a classroom. You can only learn so much standing on the sideline and watching. At some point, to keep learning and growing and becoming more confident, you have to roll up your sleeves and you have to step into it. So it is with our Christian faith. That's what we want to talk about this morning.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to Exodus, Chapter 7. We're working our way through the book of Exodus. Last week, Ryan told us that when Moses and Aaron came before the Pharaoh, they came in with kind of a swagger, which I think is right. But they got the swagger knocked out of them pretty quickly. So I think now they're just more fearful. They're more insecure. Chapter six ends with Moses once again saying, **"I am unskilled in speech; how then will Pharaoh listen to me?"** You can hear the fear in his voice. Chapter 7, verse 1:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you *as* God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst." So Moses and Aaron did *it*; as the LORD commanded them, thus they did. Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

(*NASB, Exodus 7:1-7)

So God tells Moses, "Trust Me. You are going to be God to Pharaoh," meaning you're going to represent Me to Pharaoh. Pharaoh thinks "he's" God. Egypt had somewhere in the neighborhood of 80 different gods, but Moses is going to represent the one true God, and Aaron will be like his prophet. But Pharaoh will not listen. He's going to harden his heart. We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. The text goes back and forth between God hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardening Pharaoh's heart. And I think the best way to understand both, is that what God is committed to doing is revealing His power and His presence to Pharaoh, and, at that point, Pharaoh cannot remain neutral. He has to either acknowledge that the God of Moses is the one true God—and He is obviously so—or he has to deny what he just obviously saw. And every time he does that, his heart is going to be harder and harder. So, interestingly, God says, "I'm going to **multiply my signs and wonders.**" In other words, the benefit of that is God is going to demonstrate His power and presence again and again and again.

It does raise the question, “Why is God doing it this way?” I mean, God could do this any number of ways. God could cause Pharaoh to just fall over dead. He could cause Pharaoh and his whole army to fall over dead, and the Israelites could just walk out of Egypt. But God is up to something bigger. This isn't just about getting them out of Egypt. This is about Moses' learning about the power and presence and faithfulness of God. This is about the Hebrew people learning to trust their God, and that their God would be faithful. The desire is that God will be their God; they will be His people, and He's going to lead them to a land of promise. But right now, they're just kind of a wretched gathering of angry, bitter slaves. So, this is an opportunity for them to see the power and presence of God. As a matter of fact, it's very interesting that God says, **“I will bring out my hosts, my people.”** That word **hosts** is a Hebrew word that basically means *an army*. It's used over 500 times in the Old Testament, but over half of those, over 250 times, it is captured in the phrase, *“Lord of Hosts”*, which is always in reference to the angelic army of God. God is the general and the angels are His army. It's a reminder that God, by Himself, is a majority. But sometimes you hear people talk and they think, *“If we don't get a majority, God can't win.”* It's like: God is a majority and doesn't need anybody else. God has an angelic army. So that's typically how the phrase is used. So here, to refer to the Hebrew people, this struggling, weak gathering of slaves as a “host”, or as an “army”, is basically a glimpse of what God wants to do in the lives of these people—that they will be His people and He will be their God.

The text even says that the Egyptians will know *that the Hebrew God is the one true God*. We know later on that when the Hebrew people left Egypt, it was referred to as *a mixed multitude*, meaning there were Egyptians that came to believe that the God of the Hebrews is God, and left with them. So this is God making Himself known to all these people.

The paragraph ends by telling us that Moses was 80 years old. This is worth noting. I think it's fairly clear from the text of Exodus, that this is what Moses was born to do. This was the purpose God had for him. But he's 80 years old before it's time to step in and fulfill his purpose. After forty years in the household of Pharaoh, and 40 years in the Sinai Desert, finally, at 80 years of age, he's ready to step into his calling. I think that could be frustrating for those of us who live in a culture where: “I want what I want, and I want it now!” I see this with a lot of young leaders. They have a ton of capacity and, in their hearts, “I want to be the guy and I want to be the guy now!” But sometimes the character isn't grown to match the capacity. And when that happens, the story does not end well. There's no quick way to develop and cultivate the character that God needs in us, so that our character matches our capacity in order to do the job well. So, it's just worth noting, Moses was 80 years old and finally ready for this moment. Verse 8:

Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “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.’” 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. Then Pharaoh also called for *the* wise men and *the* sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Vs. 7-13)

So Moses and Aaron obey. They come before Pharaoh, representing their God, and Pharaoh says, “Prove it,” literally, “Work a wonder; do your thing.” So Aaron throws down his staff, and it becomes a serpent. Now we’ve seen this before. This was in chapter 4 when God showed this to Moses, I think in order to build Moses’ faith. Moses and Aaron did this before the elders of Israel to convince them that God had called them to deliver the people. But what’s different about this moment is this is a completely different Hebrew word for **serpent**. The word that’s used in chapter 4 is the word that’s used in Genesis chapter 3—the serpent that tempted Adam and Eve, the serpent whose head would be crushed by the seed of Abraham. This is a completely different word. This word represents some sort of a large reptile. As a matter of fact, this exact word is used in Genesis chapter 1, verse 21, and it is translated as **the great sea monster**. It’s translated in the Old Testament as *the great sea monster*, or sometimes as *the great dragon*, or sometimes it’s referring to nations in the Psalms as dragons or sea monsters *to represent pagan nations*. So, the purpose here may capture this idea from Genesis chapter 1 that this God is the Creator God of the universe who brought chaos into order. Many of the Egyptian gods had to do with something related to creation. But there’s the one true God who is the Creator of all, who is about to bring order out of this chaos and slay the dragon.

So Pharaoh calls his magicians. Egypt was known for their magic. We would probably call it Black Magic, and his magicians are able to replicate what happened with Aaron’s staff. Now, whether this was trickery or demonic is impossible to determine, but they basically replicated it. So you have to kind of imagine the scene: Aaron throws his staff down; it becomes what some people think of as a crocodile—some sort of large reptile. So they’re kind of swaggering to Pharaoh, like, “Check that out!” But Pharaoh calls his boys in, and they replicate it. You can kind of picture the scene. “Oh, yeah! Well, check that out!” (*laughter*) But then Aaron’s staff swallows their staffs, and that’s kind of the final “Drop-the-mic” moment. “Check that out!” (*laughter*) So, it’s a great moment...but Pharaoh is not convinced. One thing that’s worth noting is there’s only two times in the book of Exodus where the Hebrew word translated **swallowed up** is used. Once is here, and the second is when the Sea swallowed up the army of Pharaoh when they were following after the children of Israel. So, this may be just a little foreshadowing of the event to come.

Starting then in verse 14, we have what we often refer to as the plagues, *the ten plagues*. That language, however, is confusing. The Hebrews referred to it as *the ten strikes*. There’s a Hebrew word that’s used several times that translates *strikes* or *blows* or *smiting*. There was a time when the English word *plagues* included *blows*, and *strikes*, and things like that. But that’s not how we hear the word today. Mostly when we hear the word plague, it’s like an infectious disease, so it’s confusing because a lot of these aren’t that. So, in the spirit of that, we’re going to refer to them as the *ten strikes*—blows against Egypt.

Now, there’s lots of discussion trying to organize all these different plagues, and most of it’s confusing, and some of it’s quite farfetched. But pretty much everybody agrees there’s one simple way to organize these strikes: There are three sets of three. One, two three; four, five, six; seven, eight, nine; and then ten stands alone. And the pattern is: the first one of each triplet happens early in the morning with Pharaoh down at the Nile River. It also includes a purpose statement—this is why God is doing that. The last one in each triplet—so three, six, and nine—happens without a revisit to Pharaoh. God just does another one. So we’ll watch for this pattern. Verse 14:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water, (So there’s the pattern.) and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent. You shall say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But behold, you have not listened until now.” Thus says the LORD, (Purpose statement): “By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood. The fish that are in the Nile will die, and the Nile will become foul, and the Egyptians will find difficulty in drinking water from the Nile.”’ 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*.”’ (Vs. 14-19)

So the first strike: Moses and Aaron meet Pharaoh, as Pharaoh is coming down to the Nile, maybe to bathe, maybe to worship the Nile gods. Moses and Aaron meet him there and say, “Listen, buddy, God is telling you to let My people go, but you won't listen.” So, as a result of that, we're going to turn all your water into blood: all your reservoirs, all your containers, all your water. Verse 20:

So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that *was* in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that *was* in the Nile was turned to blood. The fish that *were* in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt. But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Then Pharaoh turned and went into his house with no concern even for this. So all the Egyptians dug around the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink of the water of the Nile. Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile. (Vs. 20-25)

So it's interesting that the text tells us that Moses and Aaron did this right in front of Pharaoh and his servants. This wasn't some sort of a natural phenomenon that Moses and Aaron were trying to capitalize on. They wait until Pharaoh and his servants are there, and right in front of them, they turn the Nile into blood, as well as all the other, different water sources. But Pharaoh's magicians once again are able to replicate this. Now, I think this is kind of interesting. If I'm Pharaoh, I would be saying, “I don't really need more blood. Reverse it back.” That would be the real miracle. But, of course, they can't. All they can do is somehow copy it. But it's enough for Pharaoh to say, “Yeah, I'm not buying it.” The text says he went back into his house and wasn't really concerned. You can kind of imagine the body language. “Yeah, whatever,” and then back into the house he goes. Chapter 8, verse 1:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. But if you refuse to let *them* go, behold,

I will smite your whole territory with frogs. The Nile will swarm with frogs, which will come up and go into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and on your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls. So the frogs will come up on you and your people and all your servants.” Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the streams and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.’” So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. The magicians did the same with their secret arts, making frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

(Exodus 8:1-7)

So this is the second strike. They go back to Pharaoh. “Listen, Pharaoh, if you don't listen and let My people go, the land is going to be invaded by frogs.” This time, Pharaoh can't just go home and shut the door. They're in his house; they're in his bed; they're in his bathroom. They're in his cupboard; they're in his bowl; they're everywhere. But Pharaoh's magicians are able to replicate the miracle. Now, again, I find that interesting. If I'm Pharaoh, I would say, “I don't need more frogs! Make them go away!” But they couldn't do that. All they could do is somehow copy the miracle. Now, it's worth noting: Just because something seems to be miraculous from God, doesn't make it so. The enemy is really good at imitating God in order to deceive people away, and you see it multiple times here. Verse 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.” Moses said to Pharaoh, “The honor is yours to tell me: when shall I entreat for you and your servants and your people, that the frogs be destroyed from you and your houses, *that* they may be left only in the Nile?” (Vs. 8-9)

So even though Pharaoh's magicians replicated this, Pharaoh is starting to realize there's a greater power going on here. Now it feels like we're getting somewhere. He comes to Moses and says, “Pray for me”...**entreat** for me, literally is to pray for me...”that all these frogs will go away. I promise I'll let the people go.” Moses' response is very interesting: I am absolutely certain he's not saying, “Oh, honorable Pharaoh. You're so great and powerful, I'll just let you choose when this happens.” I think he's totally sarcastic. I think he's toying with Pharaoh. I think what he's saying now is, “Okay, great, honorable Pharaoh. You're so great and powerful! You tell me when you'd like the frogs removed and I'll pray it that way!” Now, why would Moses do that? Perhaps it's Moses' way of saying, “This isn't a trick. This isn't some weird phenomenon where these frogs are coming out.” But he's demonstrating, “I'll let *you* pick the hour when the frogs die, and we'll do it that way.”

But I also think it's worth noting the transformation in Moses. For a guy who said, “I'm not very skillful at talking,” he seems to have gotten really good at talking. And what you're going to see is that Aaron is going to continue to diminish away, and Moses is “the” guy. Moses is no longer the weak, fearful person he was. He is becoming this courageous, strong person of faith. Now Moses seems really strong, and Pharaoh seems really weak. It's a remarkable transformation that never would have happened to Moses had he not rolled up his sleeves and stepped into it, to experience the power and presence and faithfulness of God. Verse 10:

Then he said, “Tomorrow.” So he said, “*May it be according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. The frogs will depart from you and your houses and your servants and your people; they will be left only in the Nile.*” Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD concerning the frogs which He had inflicted upon Pharaoh. The LORD did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died out of the houses, the courts, and the fields. So they piled them in heaps, and the land became foul. But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Vs. 10-15)

So Pharaoh says, “Okay, do it tomorrow.” So, Moses prays, and God does it right on schedule. The frogs die; they're piled up in the land. It must have been just a horrific scene. But once the relief comes to the land, Pharaoh is like, “Eh! Changed my mind. I’m not going to do it.” So, we go to strike number three. Verse 16:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt.’” They did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats through all the land of Egypt. The magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Vs. 16-19)

So I mentioned one of the characteristics of the third strike in each set of three is they don't go back to Pharaoh. God just brings the next strike. So, without returning to Pharaoh, Aaron strikes his staff on the ground and the dust becomes **gnats**. The Hebrew word is kind of vague here: *gnats, lice, mosquitoes*...something...something that makes people's lives miserable. But this is the first time that the magicians of Pharaoh can't replicate what God did, for whatever reason. And they tell Pharaoh, “Hey, buddy, I just thought you might want to know. We think maybe this is **the finger of God**.” Now this may be a little bit of a play on words because the consistent language, even in these chapters, is this is ***the hand of God...the hand of God!*** It keeps repeating through the texts. The people of Israel will not be delivered through the hand of Moses, but through the hand of God! It says if the magicians are conceding that this seems to be a little more powerful than their gods, they don't want to say this is the hand of God...but we're just saying it might at least be **His finger**. They're conceding, “We may be in a little bit of trouble here.” But once again, Pharaoh doesn't want to hear it. So, strike number four, which is the first of the second three. So, again, our same pattern:

Now the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he comes out to the water, (to the Nile) and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For if you do not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of insects on you and on your servants and on your people and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians will be full of swarms of insects, and also the ground on which they *dwell*. But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of insects will be

there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land. (That's the purpose statement: "that you may know that I, the Lord, am in the midst of the land.") **I will put a division between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign will occur."** 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.** (Vs. 20-24)

So, back to our pattern. Strike number four: the first one in the second set of three: *In the morning, down at the Nile, Moses and Aaron meet Pharaoh* and say, "Listen, Bud, you're not listening, and I've just got to tell you, 'If you don't straighten up and listen and do what you're told, (I'm kind of embellishing this a little...*laughter*) then you're going to get a swarm.'" The Hebrew literally just says a **swarm**, so a swarm of something that makes their lives miserable. But what's distinct about this strike is the swarms will be everywhere, *except in Goshen where My people live*. In other words, all the Egyptians are going to be miserable...everyone except My people, for there will be no swarms in Goshen. Again, the reason for that is to demonstrate this isn't some sort of natural phenomenon. This is something sent from God, and it will be clearer when you realize my people will be the only people not affected by the swarms. It gives them 24 hours. **Tomorrow this is coming.** So the text says **the land was laid waste because of the swarms.** Verse 25:

Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." But Moses said, "It is not right to do so, for we will sacrifice to the LORD our God what is an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice what is an abomination to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not then stone us? We must go a three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He commands us." Pharaoh said, **"I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Make supplication for me."** (Pray for me, in other words.) **Then Moses said, "Behold, I am going out from you, and I shall make supplication to the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people tomorrow; only do not let Pharaoh deal deceitfully again in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD."** (Vs. 25-29)

So Pharaoh comes to Moses and Aaron, and says, "Tell you what, I'm going to give everybody a few days off. Go somewhere in the land. Do your thing." But Moses says, "No, I don't think that's going to work. *If we did that, that sacrifice would be an abomination and so offensive to your dear Egyptians, that they'd probably be so mad they would stone us to death.*" It's kind of the idea of thinking about going into a Muslim country or a Hindu country and offering some sort of a sacrifice deeply offensive to them. So perhaps that was Pharaoh's plan, that they would so offend the Egyptians that they would have a reason to kill the Hebrews. Whatever...and Moses says, "No, I don't think that's going to work." So Pharaoh says, "All right, you've got a deal. They can go but you have to pray. You have to pray to your God to take the swarms away." And Moses says, "All right, I'll do that. I'll leave and I'll pray for God to do that. But I have to warn you. Do not do what you did last time. **Do not deal deceitfully** with God." That Hebrew word translated "**deal deceitfully**" literally means something like, "Don't trifle with this God. Don't toy with Him. Don't mock Him. Don't play with Him!" We'd probably use the language, "Don't mess with this God. You did this the last time. You said you'd let the people go and you didn't but I'm going to give you another chance. But I just want to be clear here. Don't mess with this God!"

So Moses went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. The LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of insects from Pharaoh, from his servants and from his people; not one remained. But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go. (Vs. 30-32)

Chapter 8 ends on a very ominous note. Moses warned him, “Don't mess with this God.” But Pharaoh is determined not to listen, and this is not going to end well. What's next? You'll find out next week.

But a couple of things to think about as we wrap this up. One of the things that I think is so interesting in these chapters is the radical transformation of Moses as a leader. Moses will become one of the greatest leaders in human history, and we have a front row seat to the evolution of a leader. From an insecure, fearful, “I can't do this,” guy, to a courageous, powerful, faithful leader. Moses is now strong, and Pharaoh is weak. Aaron is going to begin to fade out of view. For a guy who said, “I'm really not good at talking,” he's sure doing some really good talking. But the reality is: None of this could have happened until Moses was willing to roll up his sleeves and step into it. And there he would experience God's faithfulness and he would experience God's presence and power. And there you can just see the evolution of a leader in this passage.

I think one of the reasons why Christians grow to a point, and then they just plateau, they just stop growing...they just become kind of stagnant and get stuck, or maybe even bored with their Christian life, is that somewhere along the way we get used to being comfortable. We like playing it safe. We kind of like watching from the sidelines. There's only so much you can learn in this classroom, until you're willing to roll up your sleeves and step into it and experience the power and the presence and the faithfulness of God. So many Christians are going to be content to piddle their lives away with what is safe and comfortable. And at that point, you stop learning and you stop growing. I would encourage us all this week to go back and ponder the radical transformation of Moses and realize that cannot happen unless you take some risk. You will roll up your sleeves, and whatever that means for you, you step into it, and you trust God to be faithful.

The second thing that we don't want to miss, for every single one of us today, is Moses' warning. In the book of Exodus, God is incredibly kind; He's incredibly patient; He's incredibly loving, and forgiving. But He's also the holy, righteous Creator of the universe, and we need to listen and take to heart Moses' warning, “Don't trifle with this God. Don't toy with Him. Don't mess with Him. Don't play games with Him” ...whatever that means for you right now. In this season of life, maybe it's a sin issue you need to deal with. Maybe it's a belief issue you need to wrestle through. Maybe it's just the choice to take a step and trust Jesus as Savior. Whatever it is for you, this pattern that we see with Pharaoh is such a familiar pattern. Life is miserable, so we cry out to God. God delivers us from our misery. We make all these promises, “God, if only.... But as soon as there is relief from our misery, we're like. “Eh, just kidding.” We go back to our old ways, back to our old habits. It's kind of a, “I'll call You if I need You,” and then we're miserable and we do it again. So, we need to take to heart the warning of Moses. Don't play games with this God. Don't trifle with Him. Don't toy with Him. Don't mess with Him. He is still God. Isaiah the prophet said, “*Seek the Lord while He may be found.*” I think that's really good advice for Pharaoh. I think that's really good advice for us.

Our Father, we are so thankful for who You are. You are so kind and gentle and forgiving and patient. But, Lord, may we not presume upon that and play games with You. Lord, may we, like Moses, have the courage to step into it, whatever that is, and to experience Your power and Your presence and Your faithfulness, God, that You might use us in a significant way to impact the world. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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FALL 2023 // WEEK 6

Life Group Questions

Exodus- The God Who Delivers // October 14 – 15, 2023

Don't Mess with the LORD // Exodus 7:1 – 8:32

Introduction

In Exodus chapters 7 & 8 God sends Moses and Aaron to confront Pharaoh several more times. In these two chapters we see Moses & Aaron perform signs before Pharaoh and because Pharaoh's heart is stubborn, they enact the first 4 strikes upon Egypt. Through these strikes God shows his power and Pharaoh resists the obvious conclusion that he is no match for YAHWEH. He should concede victory to YAHWEH. But he does not, which will yield disastrous circumstances.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

- 1) What's the story behind a time when a car you were in broke down?

- 2) What outside influences have had the biggest impact on you or your family?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
- 2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) **What was particularly challenging or confusing for you from this week's passage or Pastor Bryan's message?**
- 2) In *Exodus 7:1-7* we are told that Moses is 80 years old when he officially enters into his calling. **As a review, what has God done over the 80 years to prepare Moses for this moment?**
- 3) In the text, Pharaoh's magicians were able to replicate some of the "signs", but that didn't mean their signs were from God. **What do we learn from this? How should we think about signs and wonders as evidence of God?** (See *2 Timothy 3:1-5*)
- 4) A prominent theme in the working out of this battle between God & Pharaoh is the "hardening of Pharaoh's heart." In the scriptures the heart suggests thinking, taking up attitudes or making up your mind – resoluteness.

In chapter 4 we were given a preview that God would harden Pharaoh's heart. Most scholars do not believe that in doing this God is overriding Pharaoh's will to choose. Resolve gets strengthened or weakened by argument (discussion/debate). It might be more like Pharaoh hearing a voice saying, "No, don't be soft; it would be stupid to let them go," but it is Pharaoh who decides whether to listen to this voice.

This theme is mentioned as happening in almost every strike narrative, but it is mentioned in three different ways. The three ways of speaking are all significant.

- Saying, "Pharaoh's resolve (heart) was strong or firm (hard)," simply reports the phenomenon.
- Saying, "Pharaoh strengthened or stiffened his resolve (hardened his heart)," makes clear that Pharaoh's will is involved; this is not a decision imposed on him from outside.
- Saying, "God strengthened or stiffened Pharaoh's resolve, (God hardened Pharaoh's heart)" makes clear that God is also at work.

Referring to God's intention first (*Exodus 4:21*) affirms that God's sovereignty is involved. In describing how things actually work out, Exodus refers first to Pharaoh's resolve being strong or firm (*Exodus 7:13, 14, 22*) and to Pharaoh's stiffening his own resolve (*Exodus 8:15, 32*) before speaking of God's strengthening Pharaoh's resolve (*Exodus 9:12*) (next week's passage). **That order again makes clear how significant is Pharaoh's human involvement. He is not just a puppet in God's hands.***

*Excerpted from John Goldingay, *Exodus and Leviticus for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone Series

From this explanation, how do you see the idea of hardening your heart in your own life?

Pharaoh refuses to listen, then asks for prayer in his misery. Then refuses to listen once relief comes. **How might this pattern play out in our lives today?**

- 5) Pastor Bryan referred to the idea that we see Moses grow through these events. **What is the evidence in the text that Moses is growing in his courage and faith before Pharaoh? What do we learn from this for our own lives about growing in courage and stepping out in faith?**

- 6) Exodus 8 ends with the ominous feeling that things are only going to get worse. What does God need to do to get Pharaoh's attention? **What does God need to do to get our attention?**

Is there something in your life you know needs to be addressed but you keep avoiding it? What will it take for you to get serious about this issue? How can your group pray for you and hold you accountable in this area?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Scripture Focus: The idea of a hardened heart is found in other places in scripture. As a way of guarding against hardening your heart, take time to read Psalm 95 slowly and prayerfully several times this week. Listen to what the Holy Spirit might be saying to you through this passage. Ask Jesus, “Is there any area of my life that You want to speak to me about?”

Prayer Focus: Hebrews 4 tells us that we can be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Take specific time this week to confess and name your sins before God. Agree with Him that you were wrong. You might also find it helpful to use this prayer for confession of sin.

Most merciful God,
I confess that I have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed,
by what I have done, and by what I have left undone.
I have not loved You with my whole heart;
I have not loved my neighbor as myself.
I am truly sorry and I humbly repent,
For the sake of Your son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on me and forgive me,
that I may delight in Your will,
and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your name. Amen

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?