

October 21/22, 2023

Let God Be God

Exodus: The God Who Delivers Series

Exodus 9:1-10:29

Pastor Ryan Harmon

In so many ways, that proclamation we just lifted up together, “You have no rival; You have no equal...” well, it's been right at the heart of what we've been studying together as we've walked through the book of Exodus these past seven weeks. Each week, as we've been walking through this book, it seems that we've been inching kind of slowly towards a showdown. And last week, the intensity ratcheted up. We saw the beginning of this conflict unfold in earnest. What was the conflict? Well, it's, “Who is really in charge?” Is God in charge, or is Pharaoh in charge? Who will surrender? Will Pharaoh finally surrender to the God of the entire universe, or will the God of the universe surrender to a mere man? That's what we've watched. And it began in earnest last week.

Now, as we've been studying Exodus, we've said a number of times, “This is a story, a history of events that unfolded over 3000 years ago,” and so it can start to feel somewhat difficult to connect to our real life. But I would suggest to you this morning that this conflict of who is in charge, well, it's what greets each one of us the moment our eyes open every single morning. Your eyes open and you face the day, and you get flooded with all the concerns, all the worries. You're running a business; you have relationship dynamics, all the things that are going on in your life. And we're faced with a choice, and the choice is this: Will we trust in what we can do in our own power and in our own strength? Will we manipulate life and kind of struggle along, or will we live a life of surrender to the God who is in charge? That's the question that faces us each morning. And our answer to that question will shape our life more than anything else that we make decisions about on a daily basis. That's what we want to continue studying this morning, in Exodus, Chapter 9.

So, turn with me in your Bibles to Exodus 9. We're going to pick up right where Bryan left off. You remember last week we went through the beginning of these blows or *strikes*, as Bryan suggested we think of them, that God was bringing upon Pharaoh and upon the people of Egypt, as He was moving towards this goal of having His people be set free from the bondage that they found themselves in, in Egypt. And so we saw the first four *strikes* last week, and then today, in verse 1 of chapter 9, we pick up with the fifth strike.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and speak to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go, that they may serve Me. For if you refuse to let *them* go and continue to hold them, behold, the hand of the LORD will come *with* a very severe pestilence on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks. But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing will die of all that belongs to the sons of Israel.”” The LORD set a definite time, saying, “Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land.” So the LORD did this thing on the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the sons of Israel, not one died. Pharaoh sent, and behold, there was

not even one of the livestock of Israel dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go. (*NASB, Exodus 9:1-7)

Last week, Bryan helped us think about how these strikes or blows occur. They occur in a pattern of three, and here we find ourselves in the second cycle of blows, and this is the second strike within the second cycle. The first one opens up with Moses and Aaron meeting Pharaoh down by the river, often in the morning, and kind of having a conversation with him about what is about to transpire. Then the cycle always closes with God just acting on His own. No conversation. God just acts as He displays His power. So here we find ourselves in the middle of the second cycle, strike two.

Now as we walk through these strikes, you probably began to feel it last week, and it's certainly true this week as well. It starts to feel a little repetitive. And so when that happens, it's important for us to pay attention to little differences, because the slight differences, the slight alterations from the pattern, say something pretty important about what is happening. This strike upon the livestock is really a lot like what has transpired already. The livestock that were in the field would be stricken with a pestilence—really in this sense, this is the one time we really could accurately call these *plagues*—because this was a sickness. It was a plague that came upon all the livestock that was in the field. Once again, the livestock of Israel was spared—the livestock that was down in Goshen. Can you just imagine how devastating this would have been to the people of Egypt, when all of the livestock, all of the herds, all of the flocks that were in the fields, are gone! Just emotionally, psychologically, economically, what a devastating thing to transpire and to occur to the people of Egypt.

Now, as we proceed, this is the fifth strike, and in so many ways it seems similar. But there is an interesting difference in verse 7. In verse 7 we were told that Pharaoh sent some of his core people to investigate whether or not it actually is true that down in Goshen, the livestock of the people of Israel lived. And this little difference seems to suggest that, at this moment—maybe five strikes in—there's a little bit of a softening of Pharaoh's heart, or at least a question, a question of whether or not he is leading his people, leading the country of Egypt into destruction. He seems to wonder, maybe question his own belief, question his own superiority. But in the end, by the end of verse 7, he relents. His heart is hardened once again, and he wouldn't let the people go. And so we move on, and we turn to the sixth strike. Verse 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. 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.” 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. 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. And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses. (Vs. 8-12)

So this now is the end of the second cycle. This is the strike that comes really without conversation. There's no interaction; the Lord just brings this strike upon Egypt. And so Moses and Aaron take

some soot from a kiln; they throw it in the air, and God miraculously causes boils to break out upon all the livestock, all the beasts and all the people of Egypt—all those livestock that hadn't died because they weren't in the field during the pestilence.

Now, I don't know if you've ever had a boil, but I've had a boil, and they are incredibly painful. I played football in high school, and we lived down in Missouri at the time. And in my junior year, I broke my wrist, and so I wore a cast but still played. And I will tell you, that cast—I don't even want to describe the smell of that cast to you—okay, just quantities of sweat and dirt and grime. But what happened is that, of course, as I'm wearing this dirty cast, there became an infection on my arm which grew into a boil, like the size of a golf ball, right here in the crook of my arm. It was so painful that the pressure from this one boil made it hard to even move my arm. I can't imagine what this must have been like for the people of Egypt.

And we learned that as these boils struck Pharaoh's court, we then learned that the magicians, these people who have been essentially encouragers to Pharaoh, they were stricken with these boils as well. Throughout this whole episode—this conflict between Pharaoh and God—really the magicians had been serving kind of as an encourager, a support, a fortifier of Pharaoh. When God did something, we learned last week that sometimes Pharaohs' magicians would come, and they would either do a trick or they would do black magic—something like that—in order to strengthen Pharaoh's resolve that he is just as powerful as God. But here we learned that they too were stricken with these boils, and these boils were so severe that they were bedridden, so they could not serve as encouragers to Pharaoh. And as we learn of that, we reach this mysterious moment in the text that we need to talk about just a little bit, this mysterious case of the Lord hardening Pharaoh's heart.

First, we need to talk about what the heart is. Biblically, the concept of the heart is a really important concept. If I were to go and have open heart surgery, they would find my physical heart. It would be this organ that is very important, that pumps blood. But that's not what the Bible is talking about when it talks about the heart. When the Bible is talking about the heart, it's talking about this spiritual reality, very real, but it's not physical. The heart is really the center of you and me; it's this core of who we are. It's the part of us that wills, that chooses, that creates. In so many ways, the heart directs life. That's why Proverbs tells us, “***Guard your heart, because out of it springs forth life.***” The heart is a spiritual reality. And so commentators agree that when we talk about Pharaoh's heart being hardened, we are not talking about him having a callous heart or a cold heart. What we're really talking about is that part of Pharaoh that chooses. Well, it was resolutely determined to go up against God. Pharaoh is a stubborn leader, a prideful leader, resolutely determined to oppose the God of the universe.

Imagine this. Just as we have this conflict unfolding between Pharaoh and God, just imagine with me for a moment, that it's a little bit like a boxing match. God is delivering these blows, and we're on the sixth blow now. And what's transpired is that, after each blow, it's almost as if Pharaoh goes back into his corner, consults with his team, gets encouraged by his team, and they tell him, “You've got this. Yahweh is nothing. Keep at it. Look, we'll do some magic too. You're powerful; Yahweh will surrender to you!” Pharaoh has been encouraged; he's been resolute. He's been determined to go against God and his team has been there to encourage him to continue at it. “Keep going after Yahweh. He's nothing compared to you.” But here, in this context, his team is

gone. They're in bed...nursing boils. And now Pharaoh is all alone, and within that context, we read that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. So what do we do with that?

First thing I want to say is I don't think for a minute that I will resolve all the tension that comes around that idea. For millennia people have been debating, "Okay, what exactly is going on here?" But I think we can affirm two things that we believe to be absolutely true. First, we believe that God is absolutely in charge. He is the Sovereign that is overseeing all of these circumstances. He is the God of all history. And, simultaneously, we believe that Pharaoh has a free choice here. Pharaoh is making his own decisions. And so, in light of that, I believe what's happening here is that in the midst of a corner that is empty, Pharaoh has no supporters, no encouragers. In the midst of these moments, he's starting to have some hesitation, because the magicians in his court would typically come in and say, "You've got this." As they're now gone, God comes in and says, "You've got this." And God fortifies; He strengthens Pharaoh's very heart to continue to do that which He has already decided to do. In fact, that word **harden** could just as easily be translated *strengthen*. The Lord strengthened Pharaoh's resolve, strengthened his heart.

Last week, Bryan talked about how God is proposing to Pharaoh a choice. Pharaoh cannot remain neutral. Either he has to surrender, or he has to go up against God. And what we've seen over and over again is that Pharaoh has continued to stay on this path of resolute, determined resistance. One commentator had this to say about this strengthening or hardening of Pharaoh's heart. He says, "Strengthening someone's heart is about giving them the willpower or determination to do what they already have decided to do, when other factors might pressurize them into doing otherwise. The strengthening of Pharaoh's heart is not about making him act contrary to His own will. Rather it's the reverse. It's about giving him the boldness or courage to do that which he most desires."¹ Pharaoh is resolutely opposed to God, and the Lord is strengthening him in that resolve.

Now, that still raises a question for us. Why doesn't God weaken his resolve? Why does He strengthen his resolve? Why doesn't He say to Pharaoh, "Throw in the white towel. The game is over; the fight is over; it is done." And I think as we continue to verse 13, we're going to gather a bit of insight as to what really God is sovereignly doing, and why He is working the way He is. Verse 13:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve Me. For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. 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. (But hear this.) 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. Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go.

Behold, about this time tomorrow, I will send a very heavy hail, such as not been *seen* in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. Now therefore send, bring your

¹ T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus: Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (New York: Apollos, 2017)

livestock and whatever you have in the field to safety. Every man and beast that is found in the field and is not brought home when the hail comes down on them, will die.”” The one among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD made his servants and his livestock flee into the houses; but he who paid no regard to the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field. (Vs. 13-21)

Why was God working the way He was working with Pharaoh? What was his intent? Verse 16 opens it up for us, opens up the intent of God's heart. He says, **But indeed, for this reason, I've allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.**

From the beginning of this standoff between Pharaoh and God, God has made it very clear that He was going to demonstrate His power and His character to Pharaoh and to the entire nation of Egypt. As He did that, He was also going to demonstrate to His people, to Israel, that He was the powerful God that could deliver them. But here, the intent of God expands. He tells us a bit more about what He is after. He says, *My name shall be known throughout all the earth.* Oh, evangelism has always been what God is about. He always has been intent on making His name known, to let all the earth know there is no God like Him. He is supreme!

A second thing to note here that I think is interesting is just to see how, as this progresses, we're starting to see a little dissension within the court of Pharaoh. Notice how, in this case, it seems as though some of Pharaoh's household, some of his courts are starting to say, “Maybe when God says something, we ought to listen. It seems as though what God says is going to happen, actually happens.” And so, some of the servants go and get their livestock, and they get their servants out of the fields, so that when the hail comes, they will be spared. But those who disregard the Word of the Lord, well, their servants and their livestock die in the hailstorm. Yet, despite this dissension, Pharaoh is still struggling to get the picture. Verse 22:

Now the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant in the field, throughout the land of Egypt.” Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. The hail struck all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; the hail also struck every plant of the field and shattered every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel *were*, there was no hail.

Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, “I have sinned this time; the LORD is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail, and I will let you go and you shall stay no longer.” Moses said to him, “As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the LORD'S. But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God.” (Here we

get a little detail about the seasons and about agriculture.) **(Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in the bud. But the wheat and spelt were not ruined, for they ripen late.) So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread out his hands to the LORD; and the thunder and the hail ceased, and rain no longer poured on the earth. But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.** (Vs. 22-35)

This is like a song that's just perpetually on repeat, isn't it? Same song, different verse...we know exactly how it's going to go. Now it does seem that there's a little bit of progress here, as Pharaoh even says, ***"I have sinned. God is righteous; we are wicked."*** And God generously comes and starts to suggest that He will relent. Moses said, "Okay, I'll go talk; I'll make supplication to the Lord." But as soon as he does that, we see this familiar pattern of Pharaoh once again. One commentator said that Pharaoh's mode of operation is, "Say one thing. Do another." It's as if Pharaoh is inching towards surrender. But as soon as whatever is provoking him is removed, as soon as the pain is removed, he just runs right back into rebellion, into stubborn, resolute, absolute conflict with God. "I will *not* surrender!"

And that's so often how it happens. The thing that is making us run to God is removed. Or the thing that is causing us trouble and turmoil in our life, the thing that we're so upset about, causes us to run to Him. And then when everything seems peaceful again, we start to kind of drift back, to back off on the commitments that we made in moments of distress. So, we see this over and over again from Pharaoh, but here's how the Lord responds. Chapter 10, verse 1:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, 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. (Exodus 10:1-2)

Here, before we move on, we see another aspect of God's intent. Not only is He going to make His name known to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians, He's going to demonstrate His power, His might to the entire world. God is preparing. He is teaching His very people, and He says that in generations to come—to your sons and your daughters, and your grandsons and your granddaughters—you are going to look back at this moment, and this is going to be an indelible memory. You will never forget what I did here and, as you are in moments in the future of maybe struggling to believe, you will turn back upon this moment and you'll say, "Never forget who our God is. Our God is a powerful deliverer!" God's intent is to prepare His people, to teach His people to turn back and to remember who He is. Verse 3:

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go that they may serve Me. For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They will also eat the rest of what has escaped—what is left to you from the hail—and they will eat every tree which sprouts

for you out of the field. Then your houses shall be filled and the houses of all your servants and the houses of all the Egyptians, *something* which neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day that they came upon the earth until this day.” And he turned and went out from Pharaoh. Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?” So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, serve the LORD your God! Who are the ones that are going?” Moses said, “We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.” Then he said to them, “Thus may the LORD be with you, if I ever let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind. Not so! Go now, the men *among you*, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desire.” So they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence. (Vs. 3-11)

This ascension, this conflict that we've seen kind of grow, even within the court of Pharaoh, has now come to a head. It's grown into just outright statements against Pharaoh. The servants look at him, and it seems as though they're even questioning his very sanity. As they look at all the devastation that has come upon their land, they know that there is reason for serious concern because they see how the hail has destroyed everything. And if these locusts come, it's going to be absolutely devastating. And so they look at Pharaoh and they say, “Can't you see Egypt is destroyed?” Hoping to save some portion of the land, they're essentially begging him, “Will you just relent?” A plague of locusts, a swarm of locusts would be absolutely devastating!

Old Testament scholar John Walton describes what this would be like this way. He says, “Locust plagues in the ancient world were devastating. A large locust swarm could cover as many as 400 square miles, and one square mile could team with over 100 million insects, each of which could devour its own weight in food each day. Furthermore, if the locusts laid eggs, the problem would recur the next year.”²

I don't know if there are any math whizzes. (I had to use a calculator...probably shouldn't have.) That's 40 billion locusts...40 billion locusts covering the land, and, in light of this impending doom, it seems that Pharaoh has made a bit more progress. He does kind of offer a concession. He's willing to let the *men* go out and worship. But, as we all know, that was not the agreement that God had offered Pharaoh. That wasn't the deal. And so the Lord continues in verse 12:

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up on the land of Egypt and eat every plant of the land, *even* all that the hail has left.” So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt and the LORD directed an east wind on the land all that day and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt; *they were* very numerous. There had never been so *many* locusts, nor would there be so many again. For they covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every plant of the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Thus nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt.

² John and Kim Walton, *The Bible Story Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2010).

Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron and said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and make supplication to the LORD your God, that He would only remove this death from me.” He went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. So the LORD shifted *the wind* to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt. But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go. (Vs. 12-20)

So, we just said the devastation from these locusts would have been horrific, right? You’ve got to imagine that the economy, the future of Egypt is really in question at this moment. And if not just the future, because all the crops have been destroyed, the livestock has been destroyed, you now are looking at a severe famine. How are they going to feed all the people that live in Egypt? And so, in light of that, Pharaoh runs hurriedly, rapidly, and tells Moses and Aaron to come back. And he asked for the Lord to stay His hand, and the Lord graciously, without any promise from Pharaoh that he is going to do it, God does relent. He removes the locusts.

But once again, we see in Pharaoh that the second that suffering ceases, the second the problem that drove him to God is taken away, once again Pharaoh's heart is hard. He resorts to the self-reliant, stubborn resolve to do it his own way. Verse 21, now to the end of the chapter:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings. Then Pharaoh called to Moses and said, “Go serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even your little ones may go with you.” But Moses said, “You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice *them* to the LORD our God. Therefore, our livestock too shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we shall take some of them to serve the LORD our God. And until we arrive there, we ourselves do not know with what we shall serve the LORD.” But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. 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!” And Moses said, “You are right; I shall never see your face again! (Vs. 21-29)

This is the ninth strike or blow that the Lord has delivered upon Pharaoh and upon His people. This is the one that is the end of this cycle, and so it comes unannounced. Really it comes without conversation, and it is a deep darkness, an oppressive darkness, so dark they can't even see one another. They stay in their houses for three days, but, miraculously, the land of Goshen is again spared this strike. Can you imagine how frightening this would be? This is a land that soaks in sun all the time. And here, they're persisting in this daytime darkness, oppressive in its heaviness.

In response, we see Pharaoh’s duplicity on display again. He concedes that now all of Israel can go, even the children, but he's going to hold back the livestock, the animals. In the midst of God's incredible display of power—nine strikes, nine blows—overwhelming in their effect, but what

Pharaoh wants to do in this moment, is negotiate. Moses lets Pharaoh know there's not going to be any negotiation. God's will here is unilateral. The deal has been set; the terms are not going to change. So, as the chapter draws to a close, it seems as though we're given a glimpse into the very nature of Pharaoh's heart. As he lashes out at Moses, he utters murderous threats to him, "If I see you again, I will kill you." And so Moses says, "You're not going to see my face again, at least not like this." It seems as though, as we turn the page into chapter 11, it's all reached a fever pitch, and we have to ask ourselves, "What will it take for Pharaoh to surrender?" We'll read more about that next week.

Now, as we close, there's a few things that I just want to encourage us to consider. The first is something we've really been thinking about each and every week. That's the fact that the God that we serve, and Jesus His Son, well, His character is on display. And what we are seeing in these pages of Exodus, are His character, and His power. Absolutely we're seeing His power with each strike, with each blow.

But one of the things I also marvel at, as I'm reading this story, is God's incredible patience. God has made it very clear that He, at any moment, could have wiped Pharaoh from the face of the earth. He could have brought it all to an end; He could have driven His people out without hesitation. He could have done that...but He didn't! He was patient, and He was patiently unfolding the plan that He had set before His people. God is incredibly committed to His plan. He is incredibly committed to the plan that He has set forth, and He will display His power and His might, and His very character to His people.

You see, the truth is that we should be encouraged by that, because God is very committed to you; God is very committed to me, and God has a plan for our lives. For those of us who find ourselves in Christ, we have been united, restored in relationship with the God of all creation, and He has committed that He will never leave us. He will never forsake us. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that, "***All things work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.***" That's you, and that's me, if we are Jesus' people. And so, in the midst of whatever we are going through, may we find courage, may we find confidence, because we have a God who is committed to His plan. He is committed to you; He is committed to me.

The question we have to ask ourselves is, "Are we committed to Him?" Put another way, "Is our heart surrendered to Him?" We have seen what a hard heart, an un-surrendered heart, looks like. It's just made clear, right? Pharaoh is embodying it perfectly. It is a heart that looks at God and says, "I will be in charge; thank you very much. I'll take the reins; I will be on the throne." That's what a hard heart looks like. But our God is so committed to us that He patiently pursues you and me. And He pursues us so that we might come to Him, and that we might surrender to His Son Jesus, that we might step into the life that is truly life, the life that He has offered us, a life of absolute surrender!

What does a surrendered heart look like? A surrendered heart is one that says, "I am so thankful that God is God, and I am not." I'm so thankful He's God. I'm going to let Him be God because I'm an awful god. A heart of surrender revels in the fact that He is in charge of all things. And because He's in charge of all things, it happily surrenders. A heart of surrender sings forth praise and says, "You are Lord of all. You are Master of all. You are in charge of everything, whether it

be the business that I run or the schoolwork I'm working on. You are in charge of all of it; I surrender to You. Each day I surrender to You, and I glory in the fact that I get to surrender to the King of the universe. Oh, let us be a people that recognize Jesus is on the throne. He is in charge. And rather than saying to Him, "Hey, can you make a little more room for me up there?", oh let us stand before His throne and praise His name in utter dependence and absolute surrender. Let's pray together.

Our Father, we are so grateful that You are in charge of all of history and that You, through Your Son, have made a way for us to be restored into perfect relationship with You, something we could never do on our own. And now You offer us this opportunity to live in ongoing, increasing dependence upon You, the One who is able, the One who is powerful, the One who is good, and the One who is committed to us. Oh, Lord, we thank You for that. Help us. Help us in our lives and in all the little corners of our lives to know how to surrender each and every thing to You, that Your name may be glorified and that we may live the life that You have made us for. We pray these things in Your name, Amen.

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FALL 2023 // WEEK 7

Life Group Questions

Exodus - The God Who Delivers // October 21-22, 2023

Let God Be God // Exodus 9:1 – 10:29

Introduction

In Exodus chapters 9 & 10, God continues to demonstrate His power over the Pharaoh with five more strikes against Egypt while also sending Moses and Aaron to appeal to the stubborn ruler. Through it all, God also shows favor for His people by sparing them from the hardships placed upon Egypt. As the strikes grow more severe, the consequences for Pharaoh's hard-heartedness grow as well.

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 is your favorite way to start the day?

- 2) What would you most like to be known for?

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) **After reading these chapters, what stands out as particularly important, mysterious, or challenging?**
- 2) Last week, we discussed the ways in which God may be trying to get our attention and ask us to address the issues in our lives, similarly to how He probes for Pharaoh's attention. Revisit these questions from last week together, and leave room for any new insights that may have sprung up since last week: **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?**

What is one way that you've seen God making Himself evident to you? This may have happened at any time in the course of your life, or even just this past week!

- 3) We might prefer God to deliver His people quietly and He certainly could have done this differently, but that would not fit His purposes. Look at Exodus 9:13-16, as well as Joshua 2:1-11, which contains a later retelling of the legacy of God's actions in Exodus. **What do these verses tell us about God's purposes in delivering Israel the way He did?**

"The point of the plagues [strikes] for today is not so much in what we do with it, but in having our hearts and minds opened to what God has done and thereby understanding Him better." (Peter Enns, NIV Application Commentary). **What do these events tell us about who God is?**

- 4) Pastor Ryan discussed the idea of a surrendered heart in the message this past weekend. In one sense, Exodus is the story of different people surrendering their hearts to God (Moses, Pharaoh, Egyptians, Israelites, etc.). **Based on different people's responses in our passage (and the entire story of Exodus so far), how would you describe a surrendered heart?**

What are the areas in your life where you struggle with having a surrendered heart?

What would be the outcomes of surrendering in those areas?

5) On numerous occasions throughout the rest of the Bible, God's people are called to remember YAHWEH as the God who delivered His people out of Egypt (*see Jeremiah 23:7-8 and Psalm 81:10*). Below are some other truths about God that can be found throughout the Bible. As you read through them together with your group, consider the following questions: **Which of these statements of truth particularly resonates with you? Which one(s) do you have trouble believing? Which one(s) would you like to focus on seeking out in your relationship with Him? How might you cultivate the habit of remembering who God is and what He has done in your life?** (For further reflection, see the Scripture Focus Personal Spiritual Exercise on the next page.)

- In Christ we are holy and blameless (*Ephesians 1:4-5, Colossians 1:21-23*)
- God desires our friendship (*John 15:13-17*)
- His lovingkindness endures forever (*Psalm 118:29*)
- His Word is trustworthy (*Hebrews 4:12, Matthew 4:1-4*)
- He does not condemn me (*Romans 8:1-4*)
- Christ makes me complete in Him (*2 Timothy 3:16-17, Ephesians 1:13, Colossians 2:9-14, Philippians 1:6*)
- He will make my paths straight (*Proverbs 3:5-6*)
- He provides life to the fullest (*John 10:10*)
- God hears us when we speak to Him (*Psalm 66:17-20, 1 John 5:14-15*)
- He dwells within His believers (*1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19-20*)
- He is unchanging (*Hebrews 13:8*)
- He is eternal (*Isaiah 40:28-31*)
- Jesus advocates for me (*1 John 2:1*)
- God is my Father, and calls me His child (*Galatians 3:25-29, 1 John 1:11-13*)
- He has lavished His love on my whole life (*1 John 3:1*)
- He is making me like Jesus (*2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Galatians 2:20*)

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: It's so great to discuss the truth of who God is with our group, and yet we would never know any of it without the fullness of God's Word to teach us about Him. This next week, take the scripture passages that correspond with the statements about God that captivated you the most, and find a few minutes each day to think through those verses. What could they mean for your life as a whole? What would it look like to live them out today?

Prayer Focus: In chapters 9 & 10 of Exodus, God's power is on full display for all to see. How often do we stop and praise God for all of the power that He holds? Together, let's recognize His absolute reign over the world He created.

Almighty God,
No strength on this earth could compare
to your power and glory.
All of creation points to your greatness and divine authority.
Everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and you uphold the universe by the word of your power.
Allow me to see your majesty,
and to praise you more every day.
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?