

The First Confrontation

Exodus 7:1-13 Pastor Bland Mason

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BIG Idea: God wants the world to know he is God

INTRODUCTION

- In 2005, Iran was enriching uranium in some of their nuclear power plants. The goal was to develop nuclear weapons. Shy of invading Iran and sparking a massive war in the Middle East there wasn't much any one could do to stop their progress. It was only a matter of time before they got enough uranium to build a bomb. While there was no option for a traditional and highly public war, a new type of warfare was going to quietly erupt on to the world scene. Without a single uniform soldier on the ground or a single media outlet covering it, the first major salvo of Cyber Warfare was about to be lobbed at Iran and it was going to create a ripple still felt today.
- Behind the scenes the U.S. and Israel secretly developed what is now referred to as the Stuxnet virus. Its intention was simple: infect the operating system in the industrial facilities where the centrifuges were spinning to separate the nuclear material. Its job was to simultaneously speed up these centrifuges to the point they literally blow up and at the same time send a message to the control booth that everything was operating normally. The virus was delivered on a thumb drive by an Iranian double agent and was designed to hide its presence. It was so successful in hiding and doing its job that 100s and 100's of centrifuges were destroyed and the Iranians literally had no idea what had happened until years later.
- Because the virus was designed to spread and infect, it moved beyond Iran and has now infected industrial systems all over the world. It wasn't until 2010 that we became aware of this virus and to this day a lot of mystery surrounds its development.
- So while the world seemed to be collectively wringing its hand wondering what a country like Iran would do with a nuclear bomb or even several nuclear bombs, there were things at work that the public couldn't see. Experts believe that Stuxnet required the largest and costliest development effort in malware history. What the situation looked like publicly was not what was actually happening.
- We talked about his last week a bit as the Hebrews faced increased suffering as slave labor in Egypt and Pharaoh, but God seemed to not be in control of the situation. Moses felt powerless to rescue God's people and there seemed to be no hope at all. But things were not as they seemed. Behind the scenes God was moving in ways that would change EVERYTHING.
- In chapter 6 we saw that God reassured Moses and he told the people of God but they couldn't hear it because they were so broken. Chapter 6 ends with a section where Moses doubts he can do what God called him to do. God reassures him that what he has seen is not the REAL battle.
- At this point in Exodus the conflict intensifies - the players are set, the plot is in motion, but the real battle is happening behind the scenes. This isn't just about Moses and Pharaoh. This is about God working to bring about his own glory.
- **BIG Idea: God wants the world to know he is God.** We see it through the things he says and through his actions, but also through the supernatural way he moves.
- As we go through this passage, I want to encourage you to look beyond the circumstances that are happening in your life and see that there is a greater battle at hand. You can feel overwhelmed facing your addiction, or dealing with your difficult relationship but you are missing the spiritual nature of the battle that you are in. If that happens you will lose sight of who the real enemy is and what your hope is.

- We are looking at the introduction to the 10 plagues and if you just look at this story on the surface and the following 10 plagues it seems like two guys arguing and some freak natural disasters BUT there is a lot more happening. Next week we will see that each of the plagues attacks and defeats one or more of the gods that the Egyptians follow.
- Chapter 7:5 is an important clue to our passage and the plagues. *The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord*
- God wants the world to know that he is God.
- It's important that Moses, Pharaoh, Israel, Egypt, every watching nation, and every nation ever to read the story would know that God, YHWH, is God.
- Is that egotistical? Is it arrogant for the sun to be the center of our solar system? Is it wrong for all our planets to not simply do what they want but to literally spend their entire existence orbiting around the sun?
- If God is the most intelligent, powerful, and majestic being in the entire universe, who or what else would God steer human beings toward? And in fact, if God is really like that then it makes sense why sin keeps us restless our entire lives. As the great theologian of the 4th century, Augustine, once said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."
- God wants the world to know that he is God. And that's what we so desperately need. In fact, one of the things that makes Pharaoh so evil is his belief in the lie that he is god and therefore doesn't need the true God and is misleading people away from the very Being they were made for.

God wants the world to know he is God. He reveals it in his Word, his works and his actions. Then we'll get to a few points of application for all of us.

1. His Word

- One of the ways God displays that he is God is by announcing what will come to pass.
- v.3-4 *"I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you. The I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment."*
- He is simultaneously telling what will happen in the future AND that he will be fulfilling a promise he made in the past to Abraham. We talked about this last week but one of the central ways we see God is faithful is that he makes promises and keeps them. These promises are meant to sustain us.
- God's promises are tied to the idea of God's Word. God speaks and it always achieves his purpose. In the moment he speaks and it happens and when he speaks about the future it happens as sure as it is in the moment.
- Numbers 23:19 *God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?*
- God's word is powerful and his promises are sure. We will see that put on full display as the plagues begin.
- Do you know the promises of God? Do you know what his Word says about the past and the future? We need to read God's Word regularly. If you are not sure where to start, start by reading the Gospel of John. This is also one of the reasons we need to be in community groups. We need to be regularly exploring God's Word together with other people in God's family.
- God's Word shapes reality for his people both today and as we look at the future. This is one way he wants us to know that he is God.

2. His Works

- Another way is by exercising his control over nations, kings, and individuals to accomplish his will. The Bible teaches that God is sovereign. That is, he controls the universe he has created according to his will. This includes the actions and attitudes of people. This is what we see in v.3...
v.3 But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you.

- There are books and books written on this one idea but a few quick points to help us make sense here:
 - A. Pharaoh's heart is ALREADY hard. God is intensifying what is already present. God is not taking a basically good person and turning them into a super-villain. He is making an evil, homicidal, egotistical dictator even more stubborn and rebellious to make a dramatic point. (EX ch.5)
 - B. The Bible affirms that both God hardens Pharaoh's heart AND that Pharaoh hardens his heart. Simultaneously. And Moses (the author) does not even attempt to explain this. Instead it always points us to the sovereignty of God for the care of his people. (EX 9:34-10:1)
 - C. God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart serves an important function. It conclusively demonstrates that God is in control and that the release of the captives is by God's decree rather than the whims of an authoritarian monarch with an over-inflated ego. Running up the score so that Pharaoh, the Israelites, Egyptians, and all who would ever read the Scriptures would know the power of God over every nation, king, and spiritual power that exists.
 - D. This is meant as an encouragement. If God's sovereignty could be frustrated by the free will of men then Pharaoh would certainly have done this. Instead, the most evil king we have met in the Bible so far will serve BY DOING EVIL the purposes of a powerful God.
- God is showing off that he is God by doing the ultimate judo move. When he is opposed by the most powerful king in the world, that king can only ever serve the purposes of God.
- So what does it matter what I do? Well I'd rather be Moses than Pharaoh. God will be glorified by every person on this earth. You will either glorify God by putting your faith in Christ, experiencing new life in him and living out your days in this world for God's name and fame OR you will live for live for yourself, seek what you want, worship what you want and serve to display God's holiness and judgment on rebellion.
- That sounds EXTREMELY black and white but let me assure you as clearly as I can. It may be THE most black and white situation in this world. Belonging to the kingdom of Christ or the kingdom of this world could NOT be more polar opposites but the truth is, BOTH of them serve God's glory.
- In Exodus God shows his God-ness by bringing his people out against all opposition by the most powerful king and kingdom on earth.
- ILL – With the Patriots winning the Super Bowl this year there is a lot of talk about Tom Brady being the greatest quarterback in NFL history, and he is. But there will be rivals to rise up in the years ahead, some of whom may be playing the game today. A few people have speculated that the Dallas Cowboys' Dak Prescott is super young and has shown incredible promise. But if Prescott or any other quarterback wants to be the absolute best, the challenge is clear: you have to beat Brady. You have to beat his stats and his record. Anything less means he is still the best.
- God takes on Pharaoh for the exact reason that he was the most powerful human being on earth. God defeats the very best the most powerful man on earth and don't miss, it, God does it WITHOUT AN ARMY. He does it without one Israelite soldier dying. He does it slowly and systematically to display how significantly superior the one true God is than the man who claimed to be god.

3. His Wonders

- God wants the world to know that he is God and one way he displays it is through his wonders.
- v.10,13 *So Moses and Aaron went and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servant, and it became a serpent.... Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them as the Lord had said.*
- God is not showing off parlor tricks he's showing off that he is the Creator God and has power over the physical AND the spiritual.
- This is the first time that the text mentions Pharaoh's "Magicians" (v11) - The Hebrew word translated "magician" is most likely derived from an Egyptian title that refers to a *lector priest: someone who acted*

as a magician in service to the gods of Egypt and was also considered a teacher of wisdom. These men were not slight of hand guys but had a genuine spiritual power that was empowered by demonic forces. Just like all the false gods of Egypt are not mere harmless entities that didn't really have anything behind them.

- Having Moses throw down his staff is the first of 11 signs (the rest being the 10 plagues) that YHWH gives to dismantle the false gods and demonstrate his absolute spiritual dominance over them all. It is not an accident that v.12 "Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs." These false prophets may have spiritual power but God's power has no real rival. It is interesting that Moses staff doesn't merely kill the other staff snakes but ultimately consumes them all.
- The sign of the snake is significant that it is the first sign before the 10 plagues because the serpent is the royal symbol. You may remember me sharing last week that Pharaoh was a serpent symbol on his head piece. God is taking on the serpent king and is literally consuming all of the false serpents.
- This is a foretaste of what will come in the plagues. God will dethrone Pharaoh and demean his pathetic magicians who eventually will give up and run away long before Pharaoh does.
- v.13 "Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said."
- And this starts a pattern that will be repeated throughout the 10 plagues. Where a sign or wonder is done and Pharaoh hardens his heart. The evil heart of the serpent king CAN'T recognize God as God because to do so would be to be to affirm God's right to rule over him and all of Egypt.
- This idea that God wants the world to know that he is God is REPEATED THROUGHOUT THE PLAGUES – That "you will know that I am the LORD" EXODUS 8:10; 8:22; 9:14; 9:29; 10:2. We'll see more about that starting next week.

TODAY: the question remains...

How should I respond? (1 don't and 2 do's)

1. Don't Harden Your Heart

- Don't assume that someday you will soften your heart. Truth is, at any moment our hearts are being hardened against God or softened to God.
- Don't assume signs and wonders would soften your heart. If someone is determined in their heart to not surrender to God, then whatever signs or wonders happen they will explain away. For example, if we could fly Richard Dawkins here right now and God told us to pray and declare to Dawkins that God would prove his existence to Dawkins by suspending gravity in this room for 30 seconds I believe that apart from God moving in Dawkins heart so he could believe in God, he would spend the rest of his life trying to come up with a natural explanation for what happened. There is something in Dawkins heart and yours and my heart that doesn't want to recognize God as God.
- If God is speaking to you, the single most dangerous thing you could possibly do is to ignore it and harden your heart believing that someday you'll be ready to listen.
- Hebrews 4:7 "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." Across this room I believe God is speaking to all of us. For some of us it may be repenting of a habitual sin. For others it maybe calling us to take a step of faith in Christ today. For others it is about obedience in this area or that. What is God saying to you today? Whatever it is, let me plead with you to not harden your heart but ask God to speak even clearer and help you obey.

2. Do recognize the spiritual battle you are in

- Eph 6:12 *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*
- There is no Switzerland in this battle. You may think, "oh, I'm not really involved" but that is like someone in Nazi Germany saying, "Oh, I don't really get involved with supporting or fighting the Nazis" or someone

in Montgomery Alabama during the Civil Rights movement saying, “Oh, I just don’t take sides.” By not choosing you have chosen. By ignoring the battle, you get pulled into it without knowing that you are already on a side.

- The battle is real. It is Satan and his forces seeking to destroy the image-bearers of God and to demean the glory of God. Every moment of every day and in every way they can they are inciting an insurrection against the King of Kings and his favorite tool is human indifference. In our world, business and distraction help a lot with that. When we don’t recognize we are in the battle, we have already been sucked into it.
- So, how should a Christian respond to the recognition of this battle? Trust in Christ for the victory because he has already won it. It is like Jesus has snuck into the enemies capital and released the ultimate Stucknet virus that will totally and completely destroy him. The virus is released and the work is done. He keeps fighting but the war is already over. Jesus took the one power that Satan had over us – sin and he paid for it and by doing so defeated death and hell.
- Colossians 2:13-15 *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*
- The battle is REAL and you and I are in it. There’s no workout routine, no spiritual kale to eat, no hoops to jump through to experience this victory in this battle. It is found in Jesus and him alone so look to him.

3. Do rest in the sovereignty of God (Dan 4:17)

- In Exodus God was putting his sovereignty on display but it is not merely some academic or theological idea to be considered. God invites his children to REST in him.
- Resting in God’s sovereignty means trusting in the promises of God. Let me give you a couple of promises to trust, depending on who you are.
- Matthew 11:28-30 *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*
- 1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
- Some of you today need to hear that first promise... Jesus can give you rest. You are weary. Lonely. Tired. He is the only one who can truly give rest to your soul. Rest is not a place but a person... Jesus. So come believing.
- Some of you are feeling guilt for your sin but just don’t know if Jesus can forgive you AGAIN. It’s the 39millionth time it feels like. Confess and believe. Forgiveness is found not in your attempts to earn God’s favor but in trusting that Christ has already earned God’s favor on your behalf.
- PRAY WITH ME...

COMMUNION

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