

Divine Power

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[0:00] Come with me and your Bibles, or it'll also be on the screen. We're up to Exodus chapter 9. So last Sunday we talked about Moses calling, How God met him at the burning bush and called him and enlisted him into his work.

Now we're moving ahead in the story just a little bit and we're going to meet Moses in Egypt. And he's there and he's confronting Pharaoh.

So there are, this is kind of a longer section in Exodus where we go through the ten plagues and this confrontation back and forth, repeated confrontation with Pharaoh.

We're going to read from chapter 9. So plagues 5 to 7 are actually here in chapter 9. And we'll kind of be thinking about the plagues as a whole here this morning.

So Exodus 9, starting in verse 1. Then the Lord said to Moses, Go to Pharaoh and say to him, This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews says. Let my people go so that they may worship me.

[1:14] If you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them back, the hand of the Lord will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field, on your horses and donkeys and camels and on your cattle and sheep and goats.

But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die. The Lord set a time and said, Tomorrow the Lord will do this in the land.

And the next day the Lord did it. All the livestock of the Egyptians died. But not one animal belonging to the Israelites died. Pharaoh sent men to investigate and found that not even one of the animals, the Israelites, had died.

Yet his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go. Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, Take handfuls of soot from a furnace and have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh.

It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt and festering boils will break out on men and animals throughout the land. So they took soot from a furnace, stood before Pharaoh.

[2:29] Moses tossed it into the air and festering boils broke out on men and animals. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and all the Egyptians.

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said to Moses. Then the Lord said to Moses, Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews says.

Let my people go, that they may worship me. For this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people. So you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.

For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

You still set yourself against my people and will not let them go. Therefore, at this time tomorrow, I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt from the day it was founded until now.

[3:44] Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter because the hail will fall on every man and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field, and they will die.

Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside. But those who ignored the word of the Lord left their slaves and livestock in the field.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that the hail will fall over Egypt on men and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt. When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail and lightning flashed down to the ground.

So the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt. Hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation.

Throughout Egypt, hail struck everything in the fields, both men and animals. It beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.

[5:00] When Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, This time I have sinned. The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.

Pray to the Lord, for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go. You don't have to stay any longer. Moses replied, When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the Lord.

The thunder will stop, and there will be no more hail. So you may know that the earth is the Lord. But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord. The flax and the barley were destroyed.

Since the barley had headed and the flax was in bloom, the wheat and spelt, however, were not destroyed because they ripened later. Then Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city.

He spread out his hands toward the Lord. The thunder and hail stopped, and the rain no longer poured down on the land. When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again.

[6:07] He and his officials hardened their hearts. Though Pharaoh's heart was hard, he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had said through Moses. The word of the Lord.

So last week, like I said, we were at the burning bush, and we listened in on this meeting, this exchange between God and Moses, and we listened in as God recruited Moses and called him into service.

It was a pretty powerful calling story. There was a number of these powerful calling stories in Scripture, but this maybe is the most well-known one, the burning bush.

Moses met God that day, discovered that God wanted him, wanted him as a partner in ministry. And so off he goes. Moses goes with Aaron.

After all those objections and all the hemming and hawing, he goes off with Aaron and with the staff of God, right? They go off to Egypt. And really from this point forward, Moses is a man on a mission.

[7:16] What I want you to see, though, is that the rest of them had a mission, too. Moses' kinfolk, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God had a mission for them, too.

Long before God called Moses, in fact, he called them as a whole, as a people, had this grand purpose for them. And I'm not sure.

It seems like maybe over those years as slaves, they may have forgot about this and God's call and how special they were, and he's chosen the chosen status.

I mean, slavery will do that to you. They forgot over time, but God didn't forget. God didn't forget them. And God didn't forget his calling that he had for them.

It was there as much as ever. God called on Moses to go on his mission to free Israel because Israel had a mission to do. And God wanted them back.

[8:16] And God wanted them back on track with the mission he had for them, for his people. He'd said already to their great-great-grandparents, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he said, I will be your God and you will be my people.

I will bless you, and through you, I'll bless all nations of the earth. Through you, blessed to be a blessing. God wanted them, claimed them, called them.

They were his kids, his covenant people. He was jealous for them, had big plans for them. He had this mission for them to carry out. The problem was, Pharaoh had gotten in the way of that.

Pharaoh got between the Lord and his children. He basically took God's kids, and he was ruthless. We all know, I think, on a human level, how awful slavery is.

We've thought about that. But let's think, too, about slavery theologically. Pharaoh, he not only claimed their bodies, he kind of claimed sovereignty over them.

[9:28] He claimed their souls, too, robbed them of their dignity, and removed any opportunity for worship. He forced them to work for him and for his glory instead of for God and God's glory.

He forced them to build his kingdom, to build his evil empire instead of seeking first the kingdom of God and God's kingdom. Just picture with me a long train, long cargo train, weighed down with lumber, quality lumber, quality stone, building materials.

And this train, it's on its way from Brazil to Mexico, and it's going up to Mexico, to Mexico City, to build a new campus for Mexico's most prestigious university.

It's all headed up there to build the main building of this new campus, and it's a long time in coming.

It's a special shipment for a special purpose. But something happens on the way, in transport.

In order to get to Mexico, they'd go through Colombia, and it doesn't make it through, and in the middle of the night, it's hijacked by a drug cartel there in Colombia.

[10:44] And they kill the conductor and the engineers, and they divert the train, and they take all of it. They take it. And eventually they use it, all that lumber and stone and building materials, they use it to build themselves a massive fortress in the mountain.

They intercept what was meant for building a school, and they use it for building their own sinister purposes, their own hideout and fortress.

They use it for their own empire. That's kind of like what Pharaoh did with Israel. He intercepted them.

God had them on a mission, and he intercepted them. God had given them a special purpose, and they were on track to do it, and then Pharaoh stole them away.

But Pharaoh, you could say, well, he didn't know who he was messing with. So a week or so ago, I was listening to one of my favorite podcasts, and here is the second mention of Alaska here this morning.

[11:54] One of my favorite podcasts is called Dark Winter Nights, True Stories from Alaska. And so I was listening, and one of the stories, I won't go into the whole story, but it was about how this hiker got in between a mama bear and her cubs.

And it was dramatic. It did not go well. He did survive, but it was not a pleasant experience whatsoever. That mama bear was none too pleased.

But what we find here in Exodus is that Pharaoh gets between God and his cubs, and it didn't end up being a very pleasant experience for Pharaoh and his people, not pleasant at all.

So there were ten plagues altogether. The first one is the Nile to blood. And if you know anything about the geography or the history there, you know the Nile's kind of, you know, life in Egypt centers around the Nile.

And so by touching the Nile, God is really kind of getting people's attention right off the bat. And then there's the frogs and the gnats and flies. And then the next three are the ones we read about this morning.

[13:08] The livestock disease where the Egyptians' livestock died. The boils, skin disease, kale, stripped all the trees, it says, destroyed some crops.

The locusts, three days of darkness. And then the death of the firstborn. And what's interesting as you work through these, if you kind of read through those chapters, is you see this repetition as you go through.

Each time, God sends Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh with a specific message. Let my people go. And it's not Moses' message, right?

It's God's message. It's God speaking directly to Pharaoh. Let my people go. Let them go, Pharaoh. And the exclamation point at the end of each of those calls is a plague.

And the plagues, they grow in intensity, right? Pharaoh's heart is hard, and so God keeps chipping away. He starts with a chisel, and then he uses a sledgehammer, and then he uses a jackhammer.

[14:17] He won't take no for an answer. And really, what we have here is a clash, a battle, a showdown. And it might look like it's between Moses and Pharaoh, but it's actually not.

It's not even just a clash between God and Pharaoh. Ultimately, it's a clash between the Lord and the so-called gods of Egypt. Egypt had lots of gods, and when you learn about these gods, you come to see that the plagues weren't just kind of random, and they weren't just for inflicting hardship.

They really were for targeting the gods of Egypt. The Lord systematically was exposing the impotence of the gods of Egypt, these so-called gods.

They were big stuff there in Egypt, and the Lord sort of systematically took them out, exposed them. Their fraudulent status, he exposed them, and he did it for the good of Israel to boost their faith, but also for the good of Egypt to show who really is the Lord of heaven and earth.

The word plague literally means a blow or a wound. And it's interesting, back in chapter 3, God announced what he was going to do, and what did he say?

[15 : 39] He said, I'm going to strike Egypt. And then we have 10 blows that happen. He strikes Egypt.

When Egypt and its pharaoh and its pantheon of gods refuses to let God's people go, he goes to work. He takes them on blow by blow, one by one.

Hopi was the god of the Nile, and the Lord took him out when he turned the Nile to blood. Ray was their sun god, and God took him out with the plague of darkness. Hethat and Apis were gods in the form of livestock, heifers and bulls, and the Lord took them out with a disease, a livestock disease and a hailstorm.

Each one of these gods was exposed as helpless, and Pharaoh was too in the process. This week, as I was thinking about the plagues and studying up on the plagues again, I went to YouTube and looked up that old movie, The Ten Commandments, with Charlton Heston as Moses, and I re-watched the part on YouTube about the plagues.

It doesn't show all of the plagues. It doesn't dwell on it too much, but it does show the River Nile turning red, turning to blood, and it shows the hailstorm, and it's quite something to watch.

[17 : 00] The plagues actually make for good TV, right? They're dramatic, memorable. All those frogs, the hail, the swarms of locusts, all pretty wild stuff.

The most important thing about the plagues, though, really isn't the drama that they show us. It's the God that they show us.

The main point isn't about Moses, or about Pharaoh, or about Mother Nature, how this all goes. It's about God. For one thing, the plagues, they show us a God who's willing to do whatever it takes to redeem his people.

So, redemption, that's his plan, that's his purpose, and he's laser-focused on making it happen. And we see it especially because of the contrast that's here.

And if you kind of read it closely, you can kind of see the contrast that's set up between God and Pharaoh. Pharaoh's a flip-flopper, right?

[18 : 00] So, different times in the middle of plagues, he just starts talking almost like he's had a conversion. Like he believes. He talks about being ready to do God's will, let the people go, and then the plague ends, and nope, he denies God, refuses to let the people go.

And what we read this morning, in the midst of all that hail, he even confesses his sin. He literally says, verse 27, the Lord is right, and I am in the wrong. I will let the people go.

But then only six verses later, flip-flop, right? He refuses, his heart's hard again, it's yes, and then it's no, it's yes, and no. And the contrast couldn't be more clear.

There's Pharaoh the flip-flopper, and then there's the Lord. And the word I'd use for the Lord here is the word resolute. It means marked by firm determination, having a strong sense of purposefulness, bold, unwavering.

A good detective is resolute in going to investigate and solve a crime. An Olympian is resolute, right, in making her pursuit for an Olympic medal.

[19 : 17] There's this bold, steady, unwavering determination. That's our God, and that's why there were ten plagues, and not just one. He determined to expose all the false gods, and send a message to all of Egypt.

And he wanted to rescue all the slaves, and make a full rescue, a full redemption. He wasn't going to stop short, he was resolute. And we see that resolve, too, when we zoom out and see the grand story of redemption.

We find it, this same resolve, when God comes among us in the person of Jesus Christ. He came with this resolve. Luke 9, verse 51, as the time approached for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, he resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

He knew full well what awaited him there, and still he went, he set out, he walked that road. There was no halfway about it. He was willing to do whatever it took, and go all the way for us, and for our salvation, to free all the slaves.

In the King James Version, it says that he set his face like flint. In the midst of all the threats, and the insults, and the flogging, and the cross itself, he walked that road.

[20 : 36] He was determined. He resolved to redeem us, and so he did. So we see that resolve here, our God's resolve.

We also see his power and his glory here. In verse 14, just before the hailstorm, God says to Pharaoh, he says, I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people.

Why? So you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. And it's interesting, too, what God says in the next verse. Again, he's talking to Pharaoh, and he says, By now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth.

That wasn't what it was about. I have raised you up, Mr. Pharaoh, for this purpose, that I might show you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

Turns out, the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt became like an instrument in the hand of Lord Almighty. God used Pharaoh. God used him to do a little evangelism, even, to help people to see him and to believe in him, the true Lord, to reveal his power.

[21 : 52] And then in verse 29, Moses, he just kind of lays it out. He lays out the main reason for the plagues. So you may know that the earth is the Lord.

Who's king? Yahweh. It's true, sometimes he shows up in a gentle whisper and in quiet ways, with quiet strength, often.

But sometimes, the situation calls for something more and something more dramatic, and that's what we have here. It makes me think of that time that Jesus and his disciples were out in the boat, and a storm came up, and it was a pretty wicked storm.

And they were actually okay. Jesus and his disciples, they were okay. They had the Lord Almighty with them. Jesus was actually asleep on a pillow in the back of the boat, we're told, in the Gospel of Mark, right?

He knew they were okay. But the disciples, they didn't seem to believe it. The text says that they had little faith. Just a little faith.

[23 : 00] They still had very little idea of who it really was, who was with them there in that boat. Jesus knew they were safe and sound. He knew that they would be okay.

But he also knew that his disciples just had little faith. And so, he did something dramatic. The situation called for something more dramatic, a sign, a show of force.

And so that's what he did. Jesus stood up and he stilled that storm. He made a command to the waves and to the wind, and he stilled that storm. And it stopped.

Like what happened in Egypt. Our Lord showed his power, his lordship over creation in a dramatic way.

And the truth is, it's going to happen again one day. Our Lord's work right now is mostly subtle, quiet whispers, quiet strength, indwelling, infilling, providential care.

[24 : 01] Our God being sovereign and working mostly behind the scenes. But one day, one day there will be signs and wonders once again. On the day of our Lord's return, it will be more dramatic.

Because that's what the situation calls for. Evil is real. There are many today, too, who are held in bondage. Enslaved in different ways.

And all of creation is groaning. And it's not okay. And the God of the Exodus, he knows it's not okay. He's not okay with all the abuse and corruption, the greed and the violence, the immorality and idolatry in different forms.

The sin and the evil that are present in our world. He's not okay. Things aren't the way they're supposed to be. Not the way he made them to be. People are enslaved.

They're suffering in different ways. And it's not okay. And so the Bible says that our Lord is going to come back. Our great Redeemer, he's going to come back. And he's going to show up and deal with the evil that's here, that's infected his good creation.

[25 : 06] There's this evil wreaking havoc in this world that he so loves. And he's going to come back. And he's going to take it back. And reclaim it. And redeem it. And ultimately make all things new. And like those slaves in Egypt, we'll be freed completely, fully.

And all of creation too. And all people will see the salvation of our God. Now I know in this message, in this sermon this morning, I haven't answered all your questions about the plagues. I probably don't have all those answers. There's a lot we don't know. But we do know what God did there was written down for us, recorded for us in Holy Scripture for a reason.

Really, the bottom line is, it's a call for us, a call for us to see God, to behold him, and to see in him our salvation and our savior.

And to find in him our refuge. He's shown us time and again, not only his power, but also the why behind it. He's shown us, the text says that our God, he heard the cries of those slaves, heard their groaning, heard the cries of those in bondage.

[26 : 33] And our mama bear God, the great I am, he went to work, redeeming. He was riled up and he responded. We don't always understand his timing.

We don't. I understand that. But we do know his heart, our God's heart. We do. And we can be sure of his power and his resolve. And we know of his promises.

And we know he'll keep his promise to break the power of sin and to throw Satan into that burning lake. And we know that he's going to work another exodus, a greater exodus, and bring us in this world out of its bondage once and for all.

So we have good reason to be here and to meet with our God and to worship our God. We have good reason ultimately to find rest in him, real rest for our soul.

We read about it at the beginning of the service this morning. From Psalm 34. From Psalm 34. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him. And he delivers them.

[27 : 41] Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is he. Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

Our great Redeemer God, we pray that you would free us. Free us, too, even now, of whatever that's enslaving us. Draw us out of our addictions and enslavements and those things that entangle us and hold us in bondage.

Lord, draw us out and draw us closer to you. What an amazing thing it is, your great resolve to save us. And we look forward to that day when you will do away with evil forever and fix all that's broken. Come, Lord Jesus. We wait on you. We wait for you. Take and receive these our prayers, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.