

Redemption knowing Yahweh

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, I'm going to do the Bible reading today. It's not seven chapters, it's just going to be three passages from Exodus. I'm going to start at the start of the ten plagues that are sent to force Pharaoh to let the Hebrew slaves worship Yahweh.

So it's chapter 7, verse 8 to 18. Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, When Pharaoh says to you, Prove yourselves by working a miracle, then you shall say to Aaron, Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts.

For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hardened. He refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent.

[1 : 2 4] And 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 so far you have not obeyed.

Thus says the Lord, By this you shall know that I am the Lord. Behold, with the staff that is in my hand, I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood.

The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile. The next passage is from chapter 8, verse 16 to 19, and it's the third plague of the Nats.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Say to Aaron, Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in the land of Egypt. And they did so.

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 in all the land of Egypt.

[2 : 3 2] The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce 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 would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. And the last passage is in chapter 10, verses 21 to 29.

It's the ninth plague. Then the Lord said to Moses, Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.

So Moses stretched out his hand towards heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days.

But all the people of Israel had light where they lived. Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, Go, serve the Lord. Your little ones may also go with you. Only let your flocks and your herd remain behind.

[3 : 34] But Moses said, You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Our livestock also must go with us.

Not a hoof shall be left behind. For we must take of them to serve the Lord our God. And we do not know with what we must serve the Lord until we arrive there.

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. Then Pharaoh said to him, Get away from me. Take care never to see my face again. For on the day you see my face, you shall die.

Moses said, As you say, I will not see your face again. Well, good morning, everyone. Will you please pray as we come to God's word.

Lord, you are holy. You are set apart above all things. And my prayer is that as we sit in your word, you would convince each of our hearts to be holy in our hearts and in our minds, to be above everything else, in everything else.

[4 : 51] So, Lord, we pray that you would speak through your word. We desperately need your word again. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, the plagues in Egypt, they're riveting, aren't they?

It's a riveting moment in history. But is it just history? Like, why should you and I sit up and listen today?

I think we should sit up and listen because it helps us understand what Jesus says in John 8, that everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

It helps us start to see and picture and understand that the human nature is enslaved to a power that rules over us.

I think we often talk about sin as if, like, we're going to eat that 11th piece of chocolate and we still think, we still tell ourselves that we're in control.

[6 : 00] We kind of think of sin like that. It is a choice, but it's also described in Scripture more like an alcoholic. That next drink isn't a choice.

It's a power over your life. It's not one aspect of an alcoholic's life that it's not impacting from morning till night, every relationship, your job, everything.

It's doing damage all through. It's more like that. When that lustful desire at that image is so overwhelming, when that untrue comment about you is demanding vindication, when that hurtful word or action against you is just, you just want to get vengeance, when you envy your neighbor's house and car and spouse and children and I won't be happy unless I have that, and it controls you, that desire.

When the idea that your value is tied up in you being a competent parent or competent at your job or at school or at sport so that it consumes your life and your thinking, it feels like you don't have a choice.

You have to do this to be satisfied. It feels brutally strong. Sin feels like you must obey me if you want to be satisfied.

[7 : 41] We are captives. Or we were captives if you're a believer.

So we need redemption. Yes, we need forgiveness of sins we choose to do, but the Bible talks a lot about redemption.

And this is what this part of the Bible is helping us understand. Redemption in ancient times, it was a very common word. It's about slaves or about prisoners of war. In either case, you belong to a master.

And redemption is paying a price, often a high price, to purchase out of captivity. That slave to purchase them. They're mine now.

That prisoner of war to free you from captivity by paying a price. And that's what we're seeing in the plagues. God redeeming his people.

[8 : 48] And it helps us understand what Jesus has done for us in redeeming us from captivity to sin. As Yahweh says to Pharaoh, let my people go.

That they may serve me. They don't belong to you. They're mine. They're mine. This section of scripture helps us understand, if you're a Christian, you're not your own.

You don't belong to sin anymore. You were bought at a price to know the Lord. And that is freedom. That is life, to know the Lord.

Okay, so obviously the Israelites needed to be delivered from slavery. But why plagues? I don't know if you're asking that question.

The Lord surely could have saved his people from slavery any number of ways he wanted to. He could have called his people to war and just given them the victory in battle. He could have turned Pharaoh's heart to release them like he did for Cyrus, the ruler of the Persian Empire later on in history.

[10 : 08] He could have gone straight to the Passover. He could have done it any number of ways. Why the plagues? Well, it's a very unique moment in history, isn't it?

Even Hollywood is happy to make a movie about this. They are sign upon sign upon sign that Yahweh is doing the redeeming.

We saw last week this is not happening because of Moses, is it? Moses has no social standing. He's insecure from his past failures.

He's deeply aware of his disobedience and he's just unsure of how God could possibly use an unclean instrument like him. This is not about Moses. He's holding a weak piece of wood, a shepherd's staff in his hand.

But in that weakness, as he stretches out his hand for the plagues, the Lord shows his mighty hand, his outstretched arm.

[11 : 12] The plagues show us that it's Yahweh delivering his people. Israel are watching on, not lifting a finger.

It's Yahweh delivering his people. I think part of the reason is to convince our hearts and to convince Israel, God did it.

God saved you. And there's a repeated phrase throughout this section. I've put the verse references in your outline.

You can look at them later. But there's this repeated phrase. The plagues are signs pointing to truth that we need to know. That you may know.

Egyptians, that you may know. Pharaoh, that you may know. Israel, that you may know. Us today, that you may know. I am Yahweh.

[12 : 13] Obviously, I'm not talking about me. The Lord's saying, I am Yahweh. The plagues are so that his name is proclaimed in all the earth.

Here we are talking about them today. In the plagues, we see four things we get to know about Yahweh. The earth is Yahweh's.

The whole earth. There is no one else like Yahweh. Yahweh is present to protect his people.

And life is in Yahweh's hands. So let's go through these. Well, the plagues are really natural, aren't they?

Some people speculate about just very natural causes going on here. If the Nile was turned to blood, then it's an ecological disaster.

[13 : 20] It could have brought out the frogs and the frogs die and gnats come and flies swarm and so on and so on. It's really natural. If God just wanted to demonstrate that he is the power above any heavenly power that people think exists, he could have done something just really spectacular and instant.

I'm just going to make something up. Like, just blind all the Egyptians except for Pharaoh and look at Pharaoh and go, you're next, buddy. You let him go.

He could have done that. But it's just this plague, natural plague upon plague. I think what we're meant to see here is that Genesis 1 and 2, the Lord is undoing creation.

The livestock, the plants, the land, the waters, the sky, blotting out the sun and the moon. It's this undoing, unraveling of creation.

Disobedience to Yahweh breaks down the created order. I think this should challenge our view of miracles, how we think about miracles.

[14 : 43] I think we can talk about miracles as if God is absent and then he suddenly comes into his world to do something special. These plagues tell us miracles are very different to that.

Yahweh has constantly got his hand in everything. Miracles just show he just turns up the notch. He just goes, it's just this unusual activity.

Chapter 9, verse 29, I think the plagues are very natural to show he's the creator.

As we read the miracles of Jesus, his signs are anti-plagues. They aren't breaking creation down, he's putting creation back together.

People weren't made to be blind. Not the original desire. To have incurable diseases like leprosy.

[15 : 56] Their bodies to decay in a tomb. He's putting creation back together. So that you and I may know that the earth belongs to Jesus.

So the earth is Yahweh's. And the plagues show us, secondly, that there is no one else, no one else like Yahweh.

Before this section, Pharaoh objects in this first confrontation in chapter 5, verse 2, who is Yahweh, that I should obey him.

He's not an atheist. He's a pluralist, like we are today. Well, I'm hoping you're not, but like our culture is today. You have your view of spirituality.

I have my view. We've got our gods. Look at your god. You're slaves. Look at our gods. We're your masters. Like, why should I listen to your god?

[17 : 07] Why should I listen to your view of spiritual reality? So before the plagues begin, we've got this preliminary sign of the staffs turning into a snake.

I think Yahweh is using Pharaoh's own worldview, his own view of reality, to give him a warning before any damage comes. The magicians, now that's not doing card tricks.

They're magicians. They're wise men. They're ones who have knowledge. They're sorcerers who practice secret arts. These are the representatives of the gods of Egypt, and they seem in this initial encounter with the staffs turning into snakes to be more powerful.

They too can turn their staffs into snakes, and the word for their snakes in the Hebrew apparently emphasizes their fearsomeness, and it's not just one. There's multiple.

You've got this one mediocre snake and this fearsome multiple snakes. I wonder if it's just representing the worldviews.

[18 : 21] You've got Yahweh. We've got our gods. But Aaron's staff swallows up all their staffs.

It's a very generous, patient sign to give, to work within Pharaoh's own worldview.

And the structure of the nine plagues, there's three sets of three.

We're going to go through these three sets. In the first three, we've got the Nile turned to blood, the frogs and the gnats. Egypt worshipped the Nile River as a source of their life, and Pharaoh's sorcerers can replicate.

Who knows how? They can replicate the water turning into blood. They can replicate summoning the frogs. But even as early as the third plague of the gnats, the magicians, this must have gone against every fibre of their being.

[19 : 36] They're the representatives of Egypt's gods, and they tell Pharaoh something he doesn't want to hear. This is the finger of God. We can't do this.

This should be the end of the conflict. It's so, chapter 8, verse 10, that you may know that there is no one like Yahweh, our God.

There's no one like him. But Pharaoh's heart is hardened, and wouldn't even listen to his own people. As we read the miracles of Jesus, there's things in there that, I don't know if you struggle, I struggle to almost believe.

It's like driving out demons. It's healing incurable diseases. But it's so that we may know that it's the finger of God.

There's no one else like Jesus. That's why I'm not a Muslim. There's no one else like Jesus. He is so unique.

[20 : 58] He is not one idea of spiritual reality that can sit beside other views of spiritual reality. There's no one like him.

So in the plagues, we see the earth is Yahweh's. We see in this first set of three plagues, there is no one else like Yahweh.

In the second set of three, we see that Yahweh is present to protect his people. We've got the flyers, which the hands think is the worst plague.

We've got the livestock dying, and the boils on their skin. And the emphasis here is that Yahweh distinguishes his people from the Egyptians.

Chapter 8, verse 22. On that day, I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am Yahweh in the midst of the earth.

[22 : 00] Pharaohs, Egyptians' livestock die. He sends delegates, and they find out not a single animal is sick in Goshen.

And the boils on the skin, not only can the magicians not replicate it, they're taken out of action. They're incapacitated. They can't stand. Yahweh is so present, he can protect his people.

while afflicting those who oppose him and his people. Egypt is not Pharaoh's land. Yahweh is present.

One of the purposes we're told for these signs, Moses is told in chapter 10, verse 2, that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians, and what signs I have done among them, that they may know that I am Yahweh.

I just wonder how they felt. The text doesn't say, but I wonder how Israel felt just watching on, protected, even from flies. Protected.

[23 : 21] Watching Yahweh fight for them. It must have been scary. It must have been scary. What a God is our God.

But it must have been... I don't know. I don't know how to describe it. You can help me later. It must have been thrilling. That he was fighting for his people.

That he was calling them my people, and he was demonstrating that. Protecting them. Using all his power to bring you to himself. To purchase you.

To redeem you. To bring you to the one you rightfully belong to. I was encouraged afresh this week.

Just with the simple thought, I have no idea why, but this God wants me. Wow. And fights to have me.

[24 : 24] He is present. Protecting his people.

Purchasing his people. I think it's more so today, right? We can look at the cross. It's only those who look at the cross, see God, the Father's redeeming love, who can look cancer and tragedy and pain in the eye and say all things work together for good.

That's incredible. Incredible faith that Yahweh is present to protect us. So the plagues, they should convince our hearts that the earth is Yahweh's, his creator, that there is no one else like him, that he's present to protect his people.

He can protect our faith through anything to make sure we get home to glory. And finally, we see that life is in Yahweh's hands.

It's not in Pharaoh's hands. Israel feared Pharaoh for their lives, but their life was in Yahweh's hands. Pharaoh and the Egyptians needed to know their very lives are a gift for him.

[25 : 53] So here we've got the third set of plagues. We've got the hail, the locusts, and the darkness. These plagues seem to be attacking the very lives of the Egyptians.

He says, I could have sent a pestilence through. He could have just wiped them out. He's trying to convince them, warn them. Your life is in my hands. The hail killing any living thing in the field.

Locusts eating their food to live on. And Egypt's chief deity was apparently Amon-Ra, the personification of the sun and the moon who brings light and therefore life.

And Yahweh blots them out. Don't look to Amon-Ra. Now, I have no idea what chapter 10 verse 21 means.

It was a darkness to be felt. They were cut off relationally. They couldn't talk to each other. They couldn't see each other.

[26 : 59] They were unable to move from their place for three days. It was a darkness. Maybe that could be felt in their soul. I think it must have been felt like being buried alive.

It was this, I think it's a foretaste of death. Yahweh is pulling his punches.

He could have sent a pestilence. He's giving them a foretaste. Before the Passover comes, he tells the Egyptians, hail is coming.

He gives them opportunity. And those who feared the word of the Lord brought all their people out from the field. He gives them opportunity to be saved.

When Jesus was on the cross, the sun and moon were blotted out again.

[28 : 00] The Lord of all the earth, no one else like him, to protect and redeem his people, he took the place of God's judgment that we deserved.

He takes the darkness. And then he rises three days later so that you and I may know light and life are in Jesus' hands.

Well, I wonder how do you feel about how very God-centered God seems to be?

That you may know me. I wonder how you feel about that. The captivity in Egypt helps us understand our need for redemption from captivity to sin.

And I think we see a picture of a greater captivity, this captivity to sin in Pharaoh. He hardens his heart.

[29 : 15] The heart, it's the place, the seat of your desires and your choices. He hardens his heart. Or it also says Yahweh hardened his heart.

Whatever that means, that Yahweh hardened his heart, he's not violating Pharaoh's desires and decision. It's not like he's putting something in Pharaoh's heart that wasn't there before.

I think it's more like Romans 1. God's judgment is coming. And how do we see that? He hands us over to what we want. We see it at the end of the plagues.

Pharaoh says to Moses, enough's enough. Don't see me again. And Moses says, okay. He hands us over. Yahweh handing Pharaoh over to his own desires desires that are fixated on self.

I want to spend a moment looking at Pharaoh to see what a hard heart looks like. A hard heart is seen in willful disobedience to Yahweh, not listening to what he says.

[30 : 35] It's seen in chapter 7, verse 23. He strikes his God of the Nile and it says he did not even take this to heart.

He didn't think about what these signs were pointing to. In chapter 9, 17 and 10, 3, it describes the hard heart as he's exalting himself as if he is in control.

He's not humbling himself before the true God. In chapter 9, verse 30, it's not fearing that Yahweh has the power to judge. A hard heart, he's so set on his ways that he doesn't listen to the wise advice of his own people.

His magician saying this is the finger of God. Even his court officials saying, don't you see Egypt is ruined? He's already made up his mind.

He doesn't want to listen to the people, his own people even. I think we see hardness of heart in his temporary acts of repentance. When he's externally forced rather than internally convicted.

[31 : 58] I think it's like, well, Court Peters is the strongest person in here. It's like Court Peters in a wrestling match, in a headlock, and Yahweh's saying, tap out, humble yourself.

And as soon as he taps out each plague, his desire goes straight back to self. It's not internal, it's just external.

His true desire is self and to disobey the Lord. He keeps talking as if he's in control. Moses, okay, you can sacrifice it within the land.

Okay, only the men can go. All right, just leave your livestock. He hasn't got it yet. Yahweh is in control.

He's not. I think today in our modern age, there's this insidious lie in our culture, I think.

[33 : 10] With all that technology can do, it treats the earth as raw ingredients, as if we can manipulate it according to our own desires, as if the earth is man's.

But the plagues overrule that and say, no, no, whatever technology can do, the earth is not ours. It's the Lord's.

The earth is the Lord's. There's no one else like him. He redeems and protects his people. Our lives are in his hands. In Pharaoh, we see a greater captivity to the power of sin.

It's exalting self, man, exalting self at the centre of your world, and it puts you on a collision course with I am.

He's at the centre of all things. A hard heart doesn't want to know the Lord.

[34 : 24] So I just want to finish with a call for us as his people and an encouragement. So brothers and sisters, as we share our lives together in this church family and we hold each other accountable, when we're urging one another to press on, know the Lord, we're not playing games.

It's not optional. Even these Israelites who saw these wonders, we later read, harden their heart.

I love a sermon title by John Piper. I'm not sure if I've listened to it. The sermon title says it all. Our eternal security is a community project.

And he says that based on Hebrews 3. Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

[35 : 57] I need you to keep pressing into my life. Stop putting self at the centre, David. Press on to know the Lord.

We need each other. And Jesus sets us free from self to delight in knowing the Lord, to delight in serving the Lord and call it freedom, call it life.

He sets us free. He sets us free. But he doesn't do it by external force. When we look at the judgments that he took on the cross, we look at him and it changes us internally.

It softens our hearts. We look and we see the Lord fighting for us. I'm going to use a Tim Kellerism.

We look at the cross and it softens us internally. And he says this, we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe.

[37 : 16] Yet, at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. If the Son sets you free from a hardened heart, we will be free indeed to delight in knowing the Lord.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, we thank you for, we praise you as God of all the earth.

And we praise you that even in our hardness of heart, you move towards us and you want us. And you fight for us to give us a new heart to come into the knowledge of you.

We thank you for that grace. May we not boast in ourselves if we have experienced that. May we give all the credit to where it's due. And I pray for anyone who is still wrestling with knowing the Lord.

I pray that you might continue to pursue them. Father, I pray for us as a community that you would help us to delight in the fact that you are God.

[38 : 45] Help us believe that you are present amongst us. Help us to know our call to keep urging one another to meet together and to know you more and more.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.