

Knowing the Lord

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[0 : 00] Please keep that passage, which Lily read, open for us. And in your bulletin here, you'll actually find the outline of where we're going in the sermon today.

That'll help us. Great to see many of you here today. A few faces back again. Sir Peter Harcourt, great to see you again. So last week when I started, I told you some strange things that I found in the passage.

And I found some more strange things in today's story as well. So the author plonks a genealogy right in the middle of chapter six for no apparent reason.

We didn't ask Lily to read it because people are happy to read the Bible in church until they realize you put a genealogy in the passage. So we spared Lily that.

But there is a genealogy right in the middle and for no apparent reason. The other strange thing is that every time God speaks in the passage today, it has almost no effect.

[1 : 02] And that is strange, isn't it? God's powerful word, his word does everything. But every time he speaks, people just ignore him. It's very strange. The third thing that is strange is that he says, I will harden Pharaoh's heart.

You see, it's strange because how can that be God's doing, but at the same time, Pharaoh be held personally responsible? We'll have to figure out these strange things if we're to make sense of the story.

And the story so far is this. Israel, the Israelites, have been enslaved by mad king Pharaoh. Their only hope is a weak and cowardly Moses.

But it's okay because standing behind Moses is the great and powerful Yahweh. That's God. The story finished last week with this verse. When they, the Israelites, heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped.

It was very positive. And so when we begin today, it's full of hope. But Moses and Aaron, they bound up to Pharaoh, brimming with confidence in chapter 5, verse 1.

[2 : 09] This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, let my people go. And Pharaoh's response is the key today. Verse 2. Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go?

I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go. You see, Pharaoh enslaves a whole people because he's ignorant about their God.

You see, Pharaoh is the king of his jungle. He's not used to giving or taking orders. When Moses says, let my people go, it automatically challenges his authority in his own little territory.

And Pharaoh is the Bible's picture for anyone or anything in opposition to God. Any authority that would reject the Lord.

And so a Pharaoh could be a government. It could be a leader. It could be an ideology or a worldview. But it could also be an individual. Anyone or anything who sets themselves up as an authority in opposition to God.

[3 : 16] And in our time, anyone who resists the gospel or the Christian gospel are like little Pharaohs. Because the Christian gospel claims that Jesus is Lord.

And that automatically challenges their own authority in their own little jungles. And so our story is a battle between two authorities, two kings.

There's Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, versus Yahweh, the king of the world. The prize for the winner are the people of Israel. For Yahweh, for God, he wants the people for relationship.

Verse 1, let my people go so that they may hold a festival to me. Verse 3, let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord.

It's a relationship that God wants. But Pharaoh only sees a free workforce. Look at verse 4. The king of Egypt said, Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor?

[4 : 24] And so Pharaoh flexes his muscles. He commands them in verse 6 to 8 to make bricks without straw. At the same time, he says, do not let them reduce their daily quota.

Have a look at verse 9. Make the work harder for the people so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies.

You see, Pharaoh thinks that Yahweh is fake news. He thinks that Moses has invented a religious holiday just to get his people out of some hard graft.

Notice how unreasonable and unrealistic his hostility is. There's just no way they can produce the same quota of bricks whilst having to also go and fetch their own straw as well.

It's a tremendous punch in the guts. Israel are really on the ropes. Their lives have actually gotten worse, not better, because of God.

[5 : 24] Do you notice that? Their lives have gotten worse because of God, not better. And this is Pharaoh's way of reminding them who is the king of the jungle.

And as Christians and readers of this story, people who know our Bibles, we're already shaking our heads. Mate, you are so ignorant. You have no idea who you're dealing with.

But actually, even the Israelites are just the same. Look at verse 21. Chapter 5, verse 21. May the Lord look on you and judge you.

You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us. Even the Israelites don't know the God who stands behind them. And Moses is just as bad.

Look at verse 23. This is Moses complaining to God. Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people. In other words, things have gotten worse because of you, God, not better.

[6 : 28] Moses says, and you have not rescued your people at all. You see, in chapter 5, ignorance of God affects everyone.

The believers and the non-believers. Pharaoh and Moses and the Israelites. And so in chapter 6, we get revelation. Look at chapter 6. Then the Lord said to Moses, now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh.

Because of my mighty hand, he will let them go. Because of my mighty hand, he will drive them out of his country. You see, the opposite of ignorance is revelation. Now you will see, God says to Moses, it's revelation.

Have a look at verse 6, which I think is over the page. So this is God's revelation. Notice in verse 6 to 8, they're top and tailed with, I am the Lord.

I put it in bold. Last week, we said that Lord, in capital letters, is God's personal name. Not a title. It's his personal name, Yahweh. The holy, incomparable God.

[7 : 51] But Yahweh's name also refers to what he does. I am what I will do. The way you can know God, look at what he does in the world.

Moses said, you haven't rescued your people at all, God. You ignorant fool, Moses. You don't know me very well. Yahweh gives him revelation.

I will, verse 6, bring you out. I will free you. I will redeem you. Did you hear the repetition? Moses needs to know that Yahweh is the God of rescue, of redemption.

And notice verse 7. It's because of relationship that God wants. I will take you as my own people. I will be your God.

Then you will know that I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And again, these verses are top and tailed with, I am the Lord.

[8 : 54] I put it in bold so you wouldn't miss it. It's like he's staking his name, his very reputation, his identity on his ability to rescue and defeat and win the battle.

But how do Israel respond? Look at 6, verse 9. Moses reported what God said to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor.

You see, if they were good listeners, they would have heard what Moses said last week. Tim, it's on a slide, please. This was last week.

I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. God said last week things will get better. Sorry, it will get worse before they get better.

Israel should have known that the promised land was still a ways off. But they were too consumed by their present troubles to listen. Thanks, Tim.

[9 : 56] And this is our first proper look at Israel in the Bible. And it's a pattern we will see as we look at them throughout the Old Testament. My dad became a Christian last year.

And he said, for his own admission, he said, I never really knew who Jesus was till this year. And so dad now reads his Bible every day. He loves his Old Testament.

And he rings me up all the time. And he goes, what's wrong with Israel? They're so hopeless. And that's right, isn't it? The problem is we are them in the story.

Did you know that? We are them. We have had more revelation than any of them. We've got our whole Bibles. We've made movies about these stories. We even have Jesus, most of all.

But we still say the same things as Moses and the Israelites. You promised to bless me financially. You promised to bless me with my health.

[10:57] You promised to bless me in relationships. But you have not rescued me at all from any of these problems. Yes, there is a promised land for us.

But God says life will be tough before it gets better. You see, there must be something wrong with God's people.

That despite all our knowledge and revelation, our troubles, our suffering cause us to get fuzzy. To become ignorant about what God promises and what he doesn't promise.

There must be something wrong with God's people. Moses, he is the worst. Have a look at Moses, verse 10. Chapter 6, verse 10.

Then the Lord said to Moses, go, tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to let the Israelites go out of his country. But Moses said to the Lord, if the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me?

[11:59] Since I speak with faltering lips. And down the page in verse 28 to 30, I highlighted it again. It's the exact same excuse.

You see, even after all that revelation, after knowing God's personal private name, Moses is still shaking like a leaf.

And in between his two excuses, the author jams in a genealogy of the tribes of Israel. It's supposed to be the 12 tribes of Israel.

But it stops when it gets to Moses' tribe, the Levites. We hear all about Aaron's descendants. That's Moses' brother. But we hear nothing about Moses' descendants.

We know he's got a family. We know he's got a wife and kids. But nothing. Not a word about them. And I think the author's point is this. Moses is the great man. But he will not feature in Israel's future.

[12:57] If they are to have a promised land and Abraham's blessings, they will need a better priest. Hint, hint. I think that's a clue and a nod to Jesus.

And that means, after saying all of that, that means in this battle, the only one, the only one who is confident that Pharaoh is going down is Yahweh himself.

And that means when it happens, the glory will be his alone. Have a look at chapter 7, verse 2. God says, You are to say, Everything I command you and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country.

But I will harden Pharaoh's heart. And though I multiply my signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt with mighty acts of judgment.

I will bring out my divisions, my people, the Israelites. And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.

[14:04] You see, if bricks without straw is Pharaoh flexing his muscles, then chapter 7 is Yahweh flexing his. He says, Stretch out my hand.

Lay my hand. Mighty acts of judgment. It is God flexing his muscles. It is actually a very terrifying thought. Did you notice he says, I will harden Pharaoh's heart.

That is about his sovereign power. He is so in control of this battle, he can control his enemies even. He can determine their heart attitude.

But at the same time, Pharaoh hardens his own heart. That is what we will see as we go through this story. He is morally culpable at the same time.

Because Pharaoh hears the warnings. He's heard the warnings from Moses. He will see the plagues of Egypt with his very own eyes. But he will get to a point where, verse 5, he knows that Yahweh is the Lord.

[15:11] But it won't make any difference. Because the real problem isn't with his ears or his eyes, but deeper in his heart. We said at the start, it's strange, isn't it?

That how can God's powerful word not have any effect on someone? That he can say in verse 2, tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. But in verse 4, he will not listen to you.

How is that possible if we say God's word is powerful? And the answer is in the middle. I will harden Pharaoh's heart. And as the story goes on every week, we will be screaming at Pharaoh to repent. But he won't hear us. We'll be screaming at him to realize who he's up against and how futile opposition is. But he won't hear us. Not because there's anything wrong with his ears. But because there's a deeper disease in his heart. You see, the story of Pharaoh versus God is the story of the world in opposition against its creator.

[16:17] For anyone here who's not a Christian, I'm sure you're a good person. And I'm sure that you're not a mad king like Pharaoh. But your opposition to Jesus, to the gospel, it shows that you have the same heart condition.

You need to know who you're dealing with. That when Jesus returns, he will stretch out his hand. That he will bring mighty acts of judgment against you.

The plagues of Egypt next week, the famous stuff we're going to see next week. That is a picture of that final day when Jesus will flex his muscles against you. When God will no longer tolerate opposition against him.

Please take this as a revelation to you to repent while you still have time. There might be others here who come along to church every week.

Who've listened to a thousand sermons but still don't believe. Maybe you just need more revelation. Well, that's fine. It's great that you're here. This is the place where you'll get it.

[17:27] But perhaps your ignorance about God isn't so much a problem with your ears. But deeper in your heart. Maybe you don't want to give up the authority of your own little jungle.

Just like Pharaoh. For the rest of us who are Christians, this bit is really important. So please listen. Moses and Israel, they didn't listen in the story.

Did you notice that? Not because they opposed God like Pharaoh. But because of their suffering. And so even God's people show signs of the same heart condition.

Not because we're angry at God. But because of our suffering. In this story, their lives got worse. Not better. Because of God. And so Christians need to know how to suffer well.

It's important that we're clear and not ignorant about the Christian life. That way we won't shake our fist at God. You promised me blessing. And all I've got is trouble for following you.

[18:39] In our New Testament reading, which is a slide on the screen. I think. Thanks, Graham. There it is. Jesus says this. If the world hates you, keep in mind, it hated me first.

If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own. I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. And notice the key. They will treat you this way. Why?

They do not know. They're ignorant. They just don't know who God is. The world has no idea. Thanks, Graham. The world has no idea who Jesus is.

They have no idea who stands behind you. If you're suffering for your faith. Or suffering with life in general. You need to know who Yahweh is.

You need to know that he stands behind you. That his day of judgment is coming. That he won't tolerate what is happening to you forever.

[19:37] Because there's something so raw and visceral and emotional about suffering. It makes us fuzzy and ignorant about what God says and what he doesn't say.

Suffering can lead us to harden our hearts. Which eventually spreads to our ears. And we no longer listen. And the way people distance themselves from God.

Is by distancing themselves from his people. And that means church attendance. There are lots of ways to distance them. People show their anger at God.

But I think the main one. They distance themselves from God. By distancing themselves from his people. Church attendance. I'm the pastor of the 1030 congregation.

And every week Tim sends me a list of attendants. Not because we're legalists. Or anything like that. Not because I'm a headmaster. And I like to tick people off the role.

[20:36] But because when people miss two weeks in a row of church. I send them a text. And I've done that for a few years. Again not because I want to keep the register of the role.

But because I'm worried about what their lack of attendance might be saying. About their heart attitude to God. People distance themselves from God. By distancing themselves from his people. And so I'm worried. Is something wrong? Has something happened? And now you're angry at God. And so you don't want to turn up to church anymore. If you're suffering right now.

Please keep your Christianity very simple. Just commit to coming to church every week. And I know lots of you do that. Because this is the place where you'll get revelation about God.

This is the place where you'll be prayed for. Where you'll be encouraged by brothers and sisters in Christ. We're going through a period at the moment. Andrew and I have talked about this.

[21 : 38] There's quite a lot of suffering going on in our church. We're having a really bad season at the moment. Lots of really serious sicknesses. I wish it wasn't the case.

But if you do suffer. I want you to suffer well. The first thing to suffering well. Know who God is. Know that Yahweh is the incomparable holy God.

Know that He stands behind you. That He has a day where He will no longer tolerate what is happening to you. Know that in your suffering.

Come to church where you'll be encouraged by words like that. He stakes His name, His reputation on His ability to rescue you.

He longs to be in relationship with you. So as we finish now. I'm going to read chapter 6. Verse 6 to 8. I think it's at the top of your page there.

[22 : 39] I would like you to listen to it. As revelation from God. To help you in suffering. So let me read it. As what it is. A revelation from God.

I am the Lord. And I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them. And I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.

And with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people. And I will be your God. And then you will know. That I am the Lord. Your God. Who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand. To give to Abraham. To Isaac. And to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord. And so let's pray to the Lord.

As we finish. Lord Yahweh. We praise you. The holy incomparable God. The God of rescue. And Lord Yahweh.

[23 : 38] Would we never be ignorant. About you. Please would revelations about you. Would your word speak louder than our suffering. Please would we have a right expectation of the Christian life.

So that we never shake our fist and harden our heart towards you. Like Pharaoh. Please rescue us from our troubles. The way you rescued us from our slavery to sin.

And please keep our eyes pointing forward to that day when Jesus returns. And takes us to the promised land. And we say come Lord Jesus.

In his name. Amen.