

Knowing the Lord

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Date: 25 April 2021

Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 00] If you can keep that passage which Sue read open to, that would be really great. And inside the bulletin is actually the outline of where the sermon's going to go.

Last week I started by telling you some strange things I noticed in the story, and this week I found some strange things as well. Firstly, the author has plonked a genealogy right in the middle of chapter 6.

I didn't ask Sue to read it because people are happy to read the Bible for you in church unless they find out that there's a genealogy in the passage. So we didn't get Sue to read it, but we will have a quick look at it.

The other strange thing in our story today is every time God says do something, people just ignore him and don't do it. And that is odd, isn't it? In a church like ours where we teach about the Bible and the Word of God having power, every time God says to do something, people reject and ignore his word as if he said nothing.

I found that really strange. The third strange thing in our story is that God says, I will harden Pharaoh's heart. It's strange how God can do that, but Pharaoh also be held personally responsible.

[1 : 12] How are those things consistent? These are some of the strange things we're going to have to figure out if we're to make sense of this really great story. And so far in the story, the Israelites are enslaved to a mad king Pharaoh.

Their only hope is Moses, who is weak and hopeless and reluctant. But don't worry, because standing behind Moses is Yahweh, who we saw last week, the all-powerful God.

The story finished last week with this verse. I'll read it for you. It was full of optimism.

And so we begin today the same way, full of hope and optimism. In verse 1, Moses and Aaron, they bound up, brimming with confidence to Pharaoh. This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, let my people go.

And Pharaoh's response is the key. Chapter 5, verse 2. Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord.

[2 : 19] I will not let Israel go. He enslaves the people because he's ignorant about their God. You see, Pharaoh is the king of his jungle.

He's not used to taking orders. When Moses says, let my people go, it automatically challenges his authority. And Pharaoh is the Bible's picture for anyone or anything who sets themselves up in authority against God.

It could be a government. It could be a politician. 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, disobeying God, so they can be king of their own little jungle.

And so our story is a battle between two authorities, two kings. On one hand, there's Yahweh, king of the world. And on the other, Pharaoh, king of his little jungle. And the prize for the winner is the people of Israel.

Yahweh, he wants the people for relationship. Have a look at verse one. He says, let my people go so that they may hold a festival to me. Verse three, the God of the Hebrews has met with us.

[3 : 36] Let us take a three day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord. Yahweh wants these people for a relationship. But Pharaoh sees them as our free workforce, slave labor, as Warwick said.

Verse four, the king of Egypt said, Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? And so Pharaoh flexes his muscles. He commands them in verse six to eight to make bricks without straw, without reducing the daily quota.

Verse nine, make the work harder for the people so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies. You see, Pharaoh thinks that God is fake news.

He's ignorant about God. He thinks that Moses has invented a religious holiday just to get the people out of some hard graft. Notice how unrealistic and unreasonable his hostility is.

Bricks without straw, whilst also not reducing the quota. There's no way they're going to be able to do that. It's a tremendous punch in the guts. Israel are really on the ropes.

[4 : 47] Their lives have actually gotten harder because of God. Do you notice that? Their lives got harder because of God, not easier. That is opposite to how we think God works.

And this is Pharaoh's way of reminding them of who is the king of the jungle. And as Christians and readers of the story, we know this story, we're already shaking our heads at Pharaoh.

Mate, you are so ignorant. You have no idea who you're dealing with. But the thing is, in this story, actually even the Israelites think the same as Pharaoh.

Look at verse 21. They just don't know the God who stands behind them.

And actually, Pharaoh is even worse. Look at verse 23. This is Pharaoh complaining to God. Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people.

[5 : 56] In other words, things have gotten harder because of you, not easier. He says, you have not rescued your people at all. See, in chapter 5, ignorance about God is a problem for everyone, for believers and non-believers alike.

And so in chapter 6, what we get is revelation. Look at chapter 6, revelation. 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, he says to Moses, it's about revelation.

Have a look at verse 6, which is over the page. Therefore, say to the Israelites, 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. Notice I put these verses in bold, and they top and tail verse 6 and 8.

[7 : 07] Last week we said the Lord, in capital letters, is Yahweh. It's God's name. We said he's the holy, incomparable God. But Yahweh's name also means the things he does.

I am what I do. The way you can know God, look at what he does. Moses says, you haven't rescued your people at all. You ignorant fool.

You don't know me very well. So Yahweh gives him revelation. Verse 6, I will bring you out. I will free you. I will redeem you.

Do you hear the repetition? Moses needs to know that Yahweh is the God of rescue. It's the exact answer he needs when he shakes his fist at God.

And notice in verse 7, it's because of relationship. 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.

[8 : 11] And again, these verses are top and tailed by I am the Lord. It's as though God is staking his whole reputation, his identity. The way we're going to know this God is to test him against his ability to rescue the Israelites from their trouble.

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

You see, if they really were good listeners, they would have remembered what God said last week. Could I please have a slide, Tim? Sorry. This was last week. God says, I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him.

God said that things would get harder before they get better. They should have known the promised land was a ways off, but they were too consumed by their troubles to listen to him.

And in the Bible, this is the first proper look at Israel. And it's a pattern we will see in them as we go right through the Old Testament. My dad, who's not here in the room so we can talk about him.

[9 : 24] My dad, he, I guess he became a Christian last year because he said to me, he goes, I never knew who Jesus was. I never really knew until now. And so that's great.

And since then, my dad reads his Bible every day and he often rings me up because he loves his Old Testament, you see. He rings me up after reading his Old Testament. He goes, what is wrong with Israel? They are hopeless.

And that's right, isn't it? We always, you know, shake our heads at them and laugh and point fingers at them. But remember that we are them in this, or they are us in the story. You see, we have had more revelation than Israel.

We've got the whole Bible. We've got all of these sermons. We even have Jesus. And yet we still do the same thing they do. You promised to bless me financially.

You promised to bless me with my health. You promised to give me good relationships. But you have not rescued me from any of them. Yes, there's a promised land for us.

[10:24] But God says things will get harder before they get better. You see, there must be something wrong with God's people that despite all our knowledge and all our revelation, our troubles cause us to become fuzzy, more ignorant about who God is and what he has promised.

Moses, he is the worst. Have a look at 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? Since I speak with faltering lips. And down the page in verse 28, I put the same thing in bold again. It's the exact same command and excuse. You see, even after Pharaoh had that revelation, even after he learnt God's name, he is still shaking like a leaf.

And between his two excuses, the author jams in this genealogy. The genealogy is supposed to be all the 12 tribes of Israel, but it stops when it gets to the Levites.

[11:39] That is Moses' tribe. The Levites are the priests. We get all of Aaron's family. That's Moses' brother. But nothing about Moses. We know he's got a family. We know he has children, but not a word about his family.

And I think the point is this. Moses, the great man, will not feature in Israel's future. If they are to have descendants and a promised land and all the blessings of Abraham, they will need a better priest.

Hint, hint. I think it's the author's nod towards the Christ, towards Jesus. And that means, after all that is said and done, in this battle, the only one, the only one who is confident that Pharaoh's going down is Yahweh himself.

And that means, he'll get all the glory when the battle is done. Have a look at chapter 7, verse 2.

You are to say to everything I command you, sorry, 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 to you. And then I will lay my hand on Egypt. And 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.

[13:11] You see, if bricks without straw is Pharaoh flexing his muscles, chapter 7 is God flexing his. He says, stretch out my hand, lay my hands, mighty acts of judgment.

He's flexing his muscles. It's actually quite a terrifying thought when you think about it. He says that he will harden Pharaoh's heart.

And that's a statement in the Bible of God's sovereignty. He's so in control of the outcome, so in control of his enemies, that he can determine their own attitudes against him.

But at the same time, Pharaoh hardens his own heart. That's what we're going to hear throughout the story, especially next week. Pharaoh hardens his own heart.

He is morally culpable himself because with his ears, he's heard all the warnings. With his eyes, he will see all the plagues. He started the battle ignorant about God, but he will get to a point where he will know that the Lord is Yahweh.

[14:19] But it won't make a difference. Not because there's anything wrong with his ears or his eyes, but because there's a deeper problem in his heart. We said at the start, it's a strange thing.

How can God's word be ignored by people? How come it doesn't have any effect? That he can say in verse 2, tell Pharaoh to let my people go. But in verse 4, Pharaoh does not listen.

In the middle is the answer. I will harden Pharaoh's heart. And as the story goes on, we will all be screaming at Pharaoh to repent, to recognize who he's up against and that resistance is futile.

We'll all be jumping up and down, but he won't hear us. Not because anything is wrong with his ears, but because he's got a deeper disease in his heart.

You see, the story about Pharaoh versus God is a story of the world in opposition to its creator.

Anyone here who's not a Christian, who wouldn't say that they love Jesus, I'm sure you're a good

person and I'm sure you're not a mad king like Pharaoh, but your opposition to Jesus, it shows you have the same heart condition.

[15 : 36] You need to know who you're dealing with. That when Jesus returns, he will stretch out his hand and his mighty judgment against you. He'll flex his muscles against you.

That the plagues next week, which you'll see, they are a picture of the judgment on that final day when God will no longer tolerate your folksy opposition against him.

Please take this revelation as a warning to you to repent while you still have time. There might be others here who come along to church all the time, but still don't believe.

Maybe you've heard a thousand sermons, but nothing really goes in. Maybe what you need is more revelation. Well, that's fine. This is the place to be.

This is where you'll get that. But it could also be that there's nothing wrong with your ears and you may have a condition in your heart like Pharaoh because when push comes to shove, you don't want to let Jesus be king of your little jungle.

[16 : 45] The way Pharaoh didn't want God to be in his. The rest of us who are Christians, which is, I'd say, 95% of us in the room, this is really important.

Did you notice in the story that Moses and the Israelites didn't listen to God as well? Did you notice that? Not because they opposed God like Pharaoh, but because of their suffering.

And so even God's people showed signs of the same heart condition. In this story, their lives actually got harder because of God, not better.

Isn't that strange? It's the opposite of how we think God should affect our life. Their lives got harder because of him, not easier. And so Christians need to know how to suffer well.

It's important to be clear and not ignorant about the Christian life. And that way, we won't be shaking our fist at God the way Moses and the Israelites were when trouble comes our way.

[17 : 53] In our New Testament reading, please, Tim, which Kate read for us, 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. This is the key. They will treat you this way because of my name. Why? They do not know. They're ignorant about Jesus.

They're ignorant about who stands behind you. That Jesus is the Lord and that God is his Father. Thanks, Tim. If you're suffering for your faith, maybe you're suffering with life in general, you need to know who stands behind you.

That his day of judgment is coming. That he won't always tolerate what has been done to you. And he will bring justice for his namesake and for you.

Because there's something so raw, so visceral, so emotional about suffering that it makes us fuzzy and we become ignorant about the expectations of the Christian life.

[19 : 05] Suffering can lead us to harden our hearts so that eventually it flows to our ears and we just won't listen anymore. The way people distance themselves from God is distancing themselves from his people.

That's the thing I've noticed in all my years. The main way people distance themselves from God is by distancing themselves from his people and that means church attendance.

I don't know if you know this, but I get Tim at the back. He sends me an email every week and he has done for four years of everyone's attendance at church. Not because Tim and I are like headmasters and we're legalists.

Nothing like that. And for lots of you, if you've missed two weeks or more of church, I'll send you a text. How are you going? Just touching base. Is everything okay?

Not because I'm like a head teacher or anything like that, but because I'm worried that your lack of attendance might, might, might show a hardening in your heart towards God.

[20 : 11] The way people distance themselves from God is firstly by distancing themselves from his people and that means church attendance. If you are suffering right now, please keep your Christian life very simple and that means just commit to coming to church every week.

Just do that. If you're watching online and you could make it to church here in the building, please do that rather than sitting at home unless you can't make it.

If you are suffering, please make it to church because this is the place where you'll get revelation. This is where you'll get the good stuff, the true words about God so that you won't be ignorant or fuzzy in your suffering.

This is where brothers and sisters can pray for you. Every week, people sit at the front to pray for you if you need it. Please use that. This is where brothers and sisters in Christ can encourage one another.

It's a really, really important reason to be here each week. There is so much suffering in our church right now. Andrew and I have been talking and we're just going through a season right now where people are really suffering and serious business too, suffering really terrible things.

[21 : 30] It's just a season we're going through here at church. I wish it wasn't the case but if you are going to suffer, I want you to suffer well. Do you understand?

I want you to suffer well. It's unavoidable so let's do it well. And that means the first thing is to know who God is. That he is the incomparable Yahweh, the God of rescue.

He stakes his name and his reputation on his ability to deliver and save and defeat opposition. And as we finish, I want to read chapter 6 again, just a few verses.

This is revelation for you if you're suffering. If you're not suffering right now, this is the time to train yourself for when trouble comes your way.

This is the revelation you'll need when you're in times of trouble to help. chapter 6, verse 6 to 8. I am the Lord.

[22 : 37] I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them. 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 the only one who can help us. Father God, Lord Yahweh that in our times of trouble please would we not shake our fist at you.

Please would we keep coming to church where we can hear your revelation, your word so that it would equip us to love you even in times of trouble rather than shake our fist.

Please would we remember that there is a day when you will end all our suffering, when you will bring to justice everyone who has wronged us. Please would these revelations help us when the Christian life gets harder and not better.

We pray these things in your name. Amen.