

So That The World May Know That I Am God

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[0 : 00] So if Exodus was like a television drama, at this point we'd have to have the little subtitle that says, you know, last week or previously in Exodus, that little voiceover.

Because before we get into this text, we need to look back a little bit of what's been happening. We've been going through this book, the last seven chapters for quite a while, and we need to look at the key incidences that have already happened, because we don't understand that we don't really see what's happening today.

So we need to flash back to when Moses is wandering in the land of Midian, and he's shepherding his sheep, and he sees this bush that is burning, but it's not being consumed. It's not burning up, and he goes to investigate, and that's where God reveals himself to Moses.

And he gives Moses a call, a command, a mission to go to Pharaoh and to declare to Pharaoh that God wants Pharaoh to set the Israelites free, these slaves, and to set them free to go out and to worship God in the desert.

And in my mind, one of the most interesting parts of that passage is when God reveals his name to Moses, his name, Yahweh. It means, I am who I am, or just for short, I am.

[1 : 07] And remember, we said that in your English Bibles, you know that that's the name that God has given because it's translated Lord, but it's in all caps, and that's when we know that the word in there is Yahweh, referring to this covenant name of God.

So when the Old Testament speaks of God generally, it uses the Hebrew word for God, which is Elohim. And it uses that to talk about God just in general ways, but it also uses that same word Elohim to talk about idols, foreign gods, false gods.

And so we need to be careful when we're reading to see what it's meaning. But the Old Testament uses God's name, Yahweh, the Lord, to remind us of the special covenant relationship that God had with the people of Israel, and also remind us of his promise, this covenant promise that he had.

And also God uses the name Yahweh to remind us of God's authority, his self-existence. Remember, the name means I am. So every one of us, when we go to define our identity, we always define our identity based on something outside of ourselves.

So we say, I am, and then we fill in the blank. So I am a father, I am a pastor, I am a Squamishite, Squamishian, what do you guys call yourselves? What?

[2 : 25] Squamite. Squamite, okay. It sounds like no one's put a lot of thought into what the actual name is. But you define yourself based on something outside of yourself.

And all these things, they show who we are, but in order for us to define to someone else who we are, we always depend on defining either against or with something else. We define ourselves based on something else.

Our identity, our existence depends on something else. We build on a foundation that isn't our own, but that's not what happens with God. God just says, I am Yahweh, I am.

No blank, no fill in the blank, just period. And he defines himself based on him. He's self-existent. See, God is the foundation of everything else that is built.

He's the only thing that doesn't need any other foundation. And then in chapter 5, we see God through Moses first come to Pharaoh. And Moses tells Pharaoh, the Lord, that's Yahweh, again, has sent me.

[3 : 30] And Pharaoh is aware of a multitude of gods. He knows a god for the Nile, a god for the sun, a god for the weather, all these different things. He knows these hundreds of little deities, each with their own either geographic region or each with this thing that they're in charge of.

But none of them is named Yahweh. And why would he listen to this Yahweh that's declaring that he needs to let these people go? Why would he be obedient to him if he doesn't know what he does?

Why would Pharaoh listen to Yahweh if he doesn't know what Yahweh will give him, what he does for him? See, Pharaoh kind of believed in this corrupt kind of divine government where if you bribed this certain god, the god would do something for you.

And since Pharaoh doesn't know what Yahweh is going to do for him, he's not going to pay him off. He's not going to give him anything. So a few weeks ago when we looked at chapter 5, when Moses came with this request, Pharaoh said, I'm not going to listen to him.

And here in our passage this morning, we have Yahweh's response. We have God's response. Picture it as if God is walking up to Pharaoh and he bangs on the door and he says, Pharaoh, I'm here.

[4 : 41] You wanted to know who I am. This is who I am. And this divine answer to Pharaoh's question, who is the Lord, drives this narrative. So if you look in 7, chapter 7, verse 17, just before the first plague, God says he is going to send this plague so that Pharaoh will know that I am the Lord.

And then in chapter 8, verse 10, in the plague of the frogs, God says, so that you may know there is no one like the Lord our God. And in the fourth plague, in 8, 22, so that you may know that I, the Lord, am in this land, meaning Egypt.

And in the seventh plague, in chapter 9, verse 14, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. And in chapter 9, verse 29, in the same plague, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's.

And if you read through these plagues, you'll see them increasing in intensity. Okay, the first plague is just to turn the Nile River into blood. Now, clearly, that's a great and terrible sign.

It killed the fish, it poisoned the water, and no one in Egypt had fresh water to drink it. We often think just of the Nile turning to blood, but the passage says that all the tributaries and the lakes turned to blood, too.

[5 : 57] And even if someone had collected water in a jar from the Nile, that turned to blood, even though it was no longer attached to the Nile. So it was a great and a terrible plague, but it didn't really affect Pharaoh.

You see in the passage that Moses and Aaron, they went to meet Pharaoh as he was on his way to the river. He was going to take a bath. And essentially, one commentator put it like this, the only way that the plague of the blood affects Pharaoh is that it caused him to miss his bath.

That's the only way that it affected Pharaoh. So essentially, it affected Pharaoh no more than if your spouse takes an extra long shower and there's no hot water for you. And you'll note, unlike the other plagues, this first plague is something that Pharaoh can handle.

He doesn't have to call in Moses and Aaron and tell them to reverse it. He just kind of waits it out. So it's a lot harder on his servants. They have to work a lot harder to give him water to drink, but it doesn't really affect Pharaoh.

And compare that to the very next plague, where Moses makes a point of telling Pharaoh that the frogs will not make a distinction between Pharaoh and his people. So in chapter 8, verse 34, he says, The Nile will team with frogs.

[7 : 10] They will come up into your palace, and in your bedroom, and onto your bed, into the houses of your officials, and on your people, and into your ovens and kneading troughs. The frogs will go up on you and your people and all your officials.

So what God is doing is he's revealing himself. He's revealing his power and his authority. And basically what he's doing is steadily pulling back the curtain to show Pharaoh that he really is I am.

He really is the Lord. He really is the Lord of all the earth and the one who is his own foundation. So this morning I want to point to three ways that God demonstrates his authority.

Three, you can almost call them avenues. First one is that God is the authority over all places. We already mentioned the plague of the frogs, where God demonstrated that, and this is just the second plague, that he can invade the life of Pharaoh just as much as he can invade the life of anyone else.

And you've got to picture the hierarchy of ancient Egyptian culture where Pharaoh was untouchable. But yet there's no distinction in the second plague as God's plague can invade Pharaoh just as much as anyone else.

[8 : 21] Another interesting thing to look at is where Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh. I don't know if you noticed this when we were reading the text, but in the first plague they just come to him in the open, as I said, as he's going on his way down to the River Nile.

For the second, it says they went into Pharaoh. It means that they went to his court and they went and appeared before Pharaoh. And then the third, they don't even go to him directly. They just perform the plague.

They just say that they're going to send the gnats. So they confront Pharaoh in the open, then confront Pharaoh in his throne room, and then they don't even confront him at all.

And that triad repeats again in 4, 5, 6. They confront outside in the palace, and then no confrontation. And then again, the seventh plague, confront outside.

Eighth plague in the palace. Ninth plague, no confrontation. And so not only does this make a nice pattern narratively, but it helps us to see the connection and the common purpose of the plagues.

[9 : 20] But it also shows God's authority over all aspects of life. The public, in the open space, the political, and the private. But where we really see this idea of God having authority over all places is in the fourth plague with the flies.

So if you look at chapter 8, verse 22, God says this, What's God saying there?

Now I think we understand the promise that the plague won't affect his people or the land that they live in. Which, by the way, insinuates that in the previous three plagues they were affected by it.

But why does God do this? Why does God protect his people in this plague? Note it isn't, or at least it isn't primarily to just protect his people. We'll note next week that God's judgment is due to fall on both Israel and Egypt.

But, so the plague doesn't avoid Israel just because they're not deserving of God's wrath, of God's judgment. But no, God states specifically, He protects Goshen so that Pharaoh will know that I, the Lord, am in this land.

[10 : 47] And this land doesn't refer to the province of Goshen. And so God isn't saying, I want, I'm going to protect this area of Pharaoh so that you know that that's my home turf. That's where I am.

But where, when you look at it, you see that this land refers to Egypt. God is saying, I'm going to demonstrate my power by protecting, not putting frogs in this land, or in this place, so that you know that I am in Egypt.

I am here. Now this is an amazing claim if you understand how the Egyptian people would have thought. Remember, the ancient view of gods is much different than our view today, how we understand gods.

Gods in ancient culture were very much like humans. They had human-like faults. They had human-like responses. They had human-like desires. They also had human-like allegiances to territories.

They were confined to certain areas. So different gods belonged to different people and different territories. And so the only way a god could extend his territory was to equip and empower his people to go on a military conquest and to conquer another area.

[11 : 52] So what God does here, declaring that he is in Egypt, is kind of like Gregor Robertson, the mayor of Vancouver, just casually driving up to Squamish and then changing all your laws and telling you what to call yourselves.

Vancouverites, I guess, in that case. Hey, if you don't know what to call yourself, at least Gregor's going to come in and tell you. But that doesn't make any sense because Egypt isn't God's place.

God's people are slaves. If anything, God, Yahweh, as the God of the Hebrews, he should be enslaved to the Egyptian gods, just like the Israelites, the Hebrews, are enslaved to the Egyptians.

God's people are slaves. They're restricted to a certain area. But God isn't. And here he's proving to Pharaoh that he's not an ordinary God. That he is I am. And that, in fact, the whole earth is his.

Which is exactly what he says in chapter 9, verse 29, when he withdraws the hailstorm. In the same way that God has authority over all places, God has authority over all people.

[12 : 54] So that is why God's able to invade the whole land, including the palace, with his plagues. These places and the people that are identified with them belong to him. And we also see this over Israel.

Throughout the interaction between God, again, God interacting through Moses and Aaron, and Pharaoh, God refers to Israel as my people. But strictly speaking, this isn't true, is it?

The Israelites are slaves. They belong to Pharaoh. They're Pharaoh's people. They're not God's. And although Pharaoh never challenges this particular claim, he nonetheless still sees the Israelites as his people.

They are his servants. Do you remember that interaction that kicked off this whole discussion between God and Pharaoh? It was in chapter 5. We looked at it two weeks ago. And God, through Moses and Aaron, went to Pharaoh, and he said, Moses went and he said, told Pharaoh to release the Israelites.

And what did he say? He says, release them so they can go and worship God in the desert. But Pharaoh and God have a very different idea of what it means to worship.

[14 : 06] You see, Pharaoh still thinks that God is just wanting to borrow the Israelite people. To borrow them for a little bit. They're still Pharaoh's people, but God's going to borrow them so they can go and worship him.

And we'll look at, you know, how this develops in a little bit. But I want us to understand that Pharaoh is a very different idea of what worship is. You see, for Pharaoh, worship is giving a portion of what you have or who you are to whatever deity you're trying to appease.

And it might be a huge part. It might not just be a small portion. It might be a large portion. You know, when Israel is finally released and they go and they go into the promised land, they're going to meet people who felt that their gods were calling them to sacrifice children to bring benefit to the land.

Now, that's a pretty big demand. How do you say that that's just a portion of what they have? But it's still, even if it's 99%, even if you feel your God is telling you to give 99% of what you have or who you are, that's still just a portion.

And once you've paid off that debt, then everything that's left is yours. And so when Moses comes and he says to Pharaoh, let my people go and worship God in the desert, Pharaoh thinks that God is just asking to borrow them.

[15 : 25] But they're still Pharaoh's slaves and that they'll be returned. And we can see this in the interaction that they have. Because as the plagues pile up and Pharaoh finally begins to think, hey, you know what, I better let, I need to do something to protect myself from these plagues, he begins to have a negotiation with God.

And at first he says, okay, your people can worship, but they have to do it here in Egypt. They can't leave. And then after the plague of locusts, Pharaoh says, yes, you can take all the men out to worship God, but don't take the women and the children.

And then later he says, okay, everyone can go out, but you can't take the animals. You can't take your livestock. You see, what he's saying is, yeah, go out and do it. Go do your duty. Give that portion of your life that you need to.

And then you come back. Go do whatever it is you need to do. And then go come back. Go and do for this God. And then you can come back because you're mine. Because I'm just lending to God.

And right now I'm just trying to figure out how much I'm required to lend before I can start using what's left for myself. And I hope you're seeing that we're exactly like Pharaoh.

[16 : 33] That our inclination when it comes to serving God or when it comes to worship is to just give a portion of our life to God. And that's not worship. It's not the worship that Yahweh is calling us to.

Because if you are to worship the I am, it means that you're recognizing that your foundation, everything you are, not just a portion of who you are, but everything that you are belongs to him.

That's what worship is. You see, Pharaoh didn't get it. And as God's judgment and God's wrath falls on him, he says, okay, I'll give a little bit more.

I'll give a little bit more. I'll give a little bit more. But he never gets to the point where he said, I acknowledge Yahweh that you are. That you are I am. And that these people belong to you.

Not part of them. Not half of them. Not 75% of them. Not 99.9% of them. But all of them belong to you. And you know what, Yahweh? I belong to you too.

[17 : 33] Pharaoh never gets to that point. And throughout these plagues, God is proving to Pharaoh and to Israel that he has authority and ownership over all people.

He has authority and ownership over all people. Just a little aside. These actions, these plagues, they're originally given to Pharaoh as signs. But if that was all, they wouldn't be written down.

Who was reading them? Why were these written down? They were written down because they were to remind Israel that Israel belongs to God.

So the plagues were originally given to Pharaoh, to show Pharaoh that Israel belonged to God. But they were written down and they were retold and re-communicated so that Israel understood that too.

Because God is demonstrating that he has authority over all people through these plagues. And God has authority over all people. We said all places, all people, and all powers.

[18 : 29] God has authority over all powers. Excuse me. So again, Egypt had their own gods.

They had a whole pantheon of the gods that they served. And some scholars, when they look at these different plagues, they see sort of a direct correlation between some important god or deity in the Egyptian pantheon and these plagues.

And some people say that's a little bit of a stretch. I'm not sure. I don't want to wade too much into the debate whether there's an exact one-for-one correlation between each plague and a certain Egyptian deity.

But whether or not there's an exact correlation, there definitely is a clear correlation between God's attack on what Pharaoh and Egypt relied on.

So there's certainly a clear attack on the Nile River, for instance, with the plague of blood. And the Nile River, both the deity that represented it and the actual physical river itself, was something that Pharaoh and Egypt relied on.

[19 : 35] Egypt was one of the most self-sufficient kingdoms really not just in the time but in human history. And a huge part of that was the Nile. Now, whether the plague is specifically an attack on the god of the Nile or whether it's just an attack on Pharaoh's self-sufficiency, I'm not really sure.

But definitely when you get to the end, the last plague that we're going to look at, the plague of darkness, that's a direct attack, I think, on the head of the Egyptian pantheon, on the sun god Ra, which is the chief god of Egypt.

But even if there isn't a direct correlation between each plague and to a certain Egyptian god, there certainly is a direct attack on the magicians, the Pharaoh's wise men.

I can't remember what it said in the ESV, how they translated that. But these guys that tended to mimic Aaron's miracles. So the first thing we saw was Aaron went into Pharaoh and he turned his staff into a snake.

And Pharaoh should have been amazed by this, but he didn't really care because his magicians did the same thing. They turned their staffs into snakes as well.

[20 : 44] But of course, if Pharaoh was actually looking, realized that Aaron's snake was so much more powerful, his staff was so much better, the magicians weren't doing the same thing because Aaron's snake ate the snakes of the magicians.

But still, with his hard heart, Pharaoh called it a draw and said that they were more or less even. And then if you look in the first plague, the plague of blood, the whole Nile River, including the buckets of water, as I said, that people had drawn from the Nile, all of that turned into blood.

And then on a very small scale, the magicians took a little bit of pure water and they turned it into blood or faked it in some way. I'm not exactly sure what they did, but they mimicked it on a small scale.

And again, Pharaoh, with his hard heart, said that was equal, that Moses and Aaron didn't have special power because his magicians could do the same thing. We're going to see that each time that Moses and Aaron do something and the magicians try to copy it, that the gap between the product that they produce grows more and more.

So the next plague is the plague of frogs. And Moses and Aaron, with God's power, proliferate frogs throughout the entire land of Egypt. And they're basically running over the entire nation.

[21 : 59] And I think at this point, what Pharaoh really needs is he needs someone to come along and to get rid of frogs. He doesn't need any more frogs. He needs someone to get rid of frogs. But up in front of him come the magicians.

And what do they do? They make a few more frogs. So they actually make the problem worse, not better. But still, it doesn't really matter to Pharaoh. And he says that it's more or less even, except he does have to call Moses and Aaron back.

And he says, well, can you guys get rid of the frogs? Like, it would have been great if my magicians could, but could you guys get rid of the frogs? And Moses kind of funny. It would be interesting to know his personality a little bit.

Because instead of just saying yes, he says, well, when do you want that done by? You know, when do you want that done by? My God can do that whenever you want, so you just pick the time. And Pharaoh says, well, tomorrow.

And so that's what happens. So the magicians couldn't remove any frogs, but God does it on cue, right? And then the next plague is the plague of gnats. And Aaron stretches out his staff and hits the ground with his staff in chapter 8, verse 16.

[22 : 59] And the dust of the land becomes gnats and it overtakes Egypt. We should pause here. Does anyone know what a gnat is? A few of you. I should have researched this more. Little bugs.

They eat stuff. That's, well, we'll move on from that. And the magicians, they stand before Pharaoh and they say, we can't do it. We can't replicate this miracle.

They try to copy it and they can't. And even they, at this point, they recognize. And they say, this is a greater power than we have. And they say, this must be the finger of God. This must be the finger of God.

And still Pharaoh has a hard heart. And the next time we see the magicians, they stop appearing. We don't see them until a few plagues later with the plague of the boils. And this time they're called before Pharaoh to explain what's happening.

And not only can they not make, you know, reproduce the plague, they can't take it away. They can't even stand in front of Pharaoh. It says they couldn't even stand because of the pain of the boils on them.

[23 : 57] So now they're reduced to just ordinary people. They're called before Pharaoh. They can't do anything. Remember, this doesn't matter whether this power of the magicians came from a god or whether it was just, you know, trickery, sleight of hand, something like this.

That doesn't really matter. What matters is that Pharaoh, if he's honest, which he isn't, but if Pharaoh was honest, he would look and he'd say, wow, God's power is so much greater than anything that we can do.

He has authority over all these powers. Now again, we've said it before. We get distracted by the fact that Pharaoh lived in a very religious culture, a very pagan culture, and everything had a god.

Everything had a spiritual world component. So again, whether these magicians were doing something because of a god they worshipped or whether they were just really good at trickery, it doesn't really matter because Pharaoh thought that what they were doing was by the power of the great gods of Egypt.

And yet, they're clearly defeated. And we can look at that and we can say, well, that's not how we think anymore. We're not so primitive to see a god behind every cloud, every river, or every raindrop.

[25 : 10] We don't think that there's a god behind all of these things. But we do think in exactly the same way because when we look at our world, we don't attach a divine power behind everything, but we still attach a power to it.

And we don't see God as the authority, the power behind all of those powers. So let's be honest for a second. It's a great power to be accepted. There's something deep within us to be loved, to be cared for.

And that's an authority in our life. That's something that drives us. We're driven by this need to be accepted. And you know what? It should be like that. That's something in how God has created us.

We're created to be in community, to be loved and accepted by others. But when we don't see God as the authority and the power above that power, then we're going to serve that power to be accepted wherever we think we can find it, even if that isn't in God.

And it's a great power for us to pursue pleasure, to rest, to enjoy creation. There's something in us to do that. And that's right. That's how God has made us.

[26 : 17] God put us in a creation that He made for us to enjoy. But when we don't see God as the authority and the power behind that power, we're going to seek the power of pleasure wherever we can find it, even if it isn't in God.

And then there's something in us to be respected. We're created as a human race, being in the image of God, we expect to be respected. And there's truth in that.

That's something that's real. But when we don't see God as the authority over that power, then we're going to seek to be respected anywhere we can find it, even if that isn't in God.

So do you see, this is what leads us to sin. When we don't see God as the authority, the power over all powers. Why do we sin? What do the scriptures say?

James says this. James says, But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.

[27 : 19] We sin because of our own evil desires. These things within us that are true and right desires, but they get corrupted. It isn't just someone else pulling us into sin.

It isn't someone else. It's our own lust. James is saying that there's something within us where we see a power, but we don't see God as the authority and the true power above that.

So we serve the lower power and we say, this friend, this relationship, this lie, this food, this job, this television show, whatever it is, this pleasure will fill me and it will fill me in a way that God can't.

Because we see the power, the lower power, but we don't see the true power above all powers. We don't see Yahweh, the Lord, I am. We don't see that He is above all powers.

He's authority over all people. He's authority over all places. And He's authority over all powers. And if we don't understand this, we'll be throwing our lives to worship of a lesser power.

[28 : 22] Not only is that a waste, but it's destructive. We can see the destructive power of it in these plagues. But we can see it in our own lives as well.

There's an American author named David Foster Wallace and he understood this. He's not a Christian, but he has this famous commencement address to Kenyon College that was put into a short story, a book called This is Water.

This is what he says. I thought it's very insightful. It says, in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is no such thing as atheism.

There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God, again, he isn't a Christian, is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive.

If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in your life, then you'll never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you.

[29 : 24] Worship power. You will feel weak and afraid and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart. You will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out, and so on.

So you see, these plagues, God demonstrates externally what ultimately happens internally when we throw our worship to other places. In our culture, we get this idea that freedom comes from throwing off power, but you can't throw off power.

You can only replace it. Everybody worships. There's always something that you're going to be seeing as the power in your life. We can't throw off power. We can only replace it.

The question is then, what are we going to worship? Or who are we going to worship? And we end up asking the same question that Pharaoh asks. Who is the Lord? And the answer, I am who I am.

I am the power above all places. I am the power above all people. I am the power above all powers. The only one we can worship. And anything else leads us to sin and it leads us to destruction.

[30 : 36] Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your power, for your authority over all things. And we pray you help us to see where we are worshiping other powers, where we are seeing something else as more powerful that has a promise greater than what you offer us.

And help us to see the lie of that and to understand that you are truly the one that is in authority over it as well. And to give back that worship.

So that we're worshiping you not with a portion but with all of who we are because who we are is rooted in you. You made us, you created us, and you saved us. So we pray that you through your spirit convict us of where we are like Pharaoh and place our trust in something else.

And draw us into worship of you so that we are not destroyed by your wrath. We pray this in your name. Amen.