

The Judgement of the Lord

Exodus 7:8-10:29

I have often found stories about an 'underdog' compelling.

There is something in me that loves to root for a person or group of people who appear as though all the odds are stacked against them.

Recently I saw a movie entitled "The Perfect Game" it was about the 1957 little league world series and it focused on a team from Mexico.

They literally started the team with about as little as you can imagine.

Money was so scarce that they had to walk several miles to their first game and no one thought they would even win a single game against all the other teams that had so much in the way of resources by comparison.

They ended up winning that game.

In fact they kept winning and eventually won the Little League World Series of 1957.

I found myself throughout the movie cheering for those boys wanting them to defy the odds and come out on top.

The bible is filled with those kinds of stories, which is one of the reasons why I think I love the Bible.

I bet if we were in the same room most of you could easily name several stories where God's people were the underdogs.

Think of Noah! It was quite literally Noah against the world.

How about Gideon taking on the Midianites and Amalekites who numbered in the hundreds of thousands with 300 guys.

Perhaps the best known of them all David and Goliath, that one is so well known it has become an expression in our language even among people who have never even read the bible.

David a strong young shepherd but who appeared like a stick beside the over nine foot Philistine adorned in armor and carrying enormous weapons.

David goes out to the battlefield with just a sling and 5 stones and with a single shot wins the day.

[There is story after story like that in the bible. In many ways where we are in the book of Exodus is like that. Two guys from a people in slavery go to the powerful king who is holding their people captive and say "Let them go"! The difference between their earthly positions is about as great as it gets. For this reason, I have always thought about Moses and Aaron as the underdogs in this situation. But the thought occurred to me that the underdog here is really the King of Egypt. In **Exodus 7:8-10:29** we find the King of Egypt is the underdog. What normally endears me to an underdog is they are usually facing someone who doing something evil and therefore I want to see them fail. In this case, however, it is the underdog who is doing the evil and God in His righteousness is bringing His judgement against this king. These chapters teach us some important realities concerning the judgment of God. There is a great deal of warning for us here but there is

also encouragement. These chapters cover 10 signs from the LORD to the king of Egypt with nine of them being plagues. Looking at what seem to be recurring themes through this text there are at least four important lessons for us concerning the judgement of the LORD. Lesson number one is this...]

Point #1 – Disregarding God’s warnings leads to judgement.

It is impossible for any human being to ignore the commands of our Creator and escape the terrible and potentially eternal consequences of such decisions.

While there is a mountain of suffering that is heaped upon the Egyptians, it is preceded by warning.

The first sign shown to the king causes no affliction (**7:8-13**)

When Moses and Aaron first went to the king of Egypt to give him the command from God, he replied by asking, “Who is the LORD that I should obey Him..?”

That is more of a statement than a question. He sees no evidence that God is able to do anything to him.

Because of this attitude God is expecting the king to ask for a sign. He is going to ask for a compelling reason to listen.

The LORD graciously grants such a sign by turning a staff into a snake.

When we consider that this is Almighty God who created everything from nothing (think on that for a while and be amazed), a staff to a snake is small thing to say the least.

Nevertheless, we are told that “Pharaoh’s heart became hard and he would not listen.”

Because he refuses to listen God commands Moses to have Aaron take that same staff and “strike the water of the Nile” and the result is that the water turns to blood and becomes unusable.

Again the king’s “heart became hard” (7:22).

In 8:2 we read this.

He does not pay attention to the warning and the frogs come.

Look with me at **8:21**, and the king ignores the warning.

Listen to the warning of **9:2**, but again it is ignored.

The words of **9:13-14** are most serious, look there, but the warning falls on deaf ears and a catastrophic hail storm comes upon the land.

Again in **10:4** there is another warning. For a moment the king appears to listen but then persists in defying God and the locusts come.

The lesson is clear, when we disregard God’s warnings it leads to judgement.

[When I am driving around the county I often notice the substations that service our electrical grid. They are important for making sure everyone gets the power they need but they are also incredibly dangerous. There are thousands upon thousands of volts present there and touching the wrong thing will almost certainly end badly. For that reason they build fences around those substations and put up multiple signs that are hard to miss that warn of the danger and tell people to stay out. If you ignore those signs and climb the fence and wonder around inside the fence you are almost certainly going to get hurt.]

Most people understand that if you don't pay attention to warnings bad things are going to happen.

That is certainly true when it comes to the LORD.

He gives warning after warning.

He displays His glory in creation.

He has put a sense of right and wrong into the human mind.

Most importantly He has given His written word.

[Are you listening? One of the things that has struck me through this Corona virus crisis is how little attention anyone has given to the LORD. I heard a pastor say the other day that this is the "thunderclap of the Lord" calling a godless world to repentance. Instead our world persists in evil. I heard the governor of New York say the other day that God had nothing to do with the progress being made against the pandemic and all I could think of how gracious God is being to not completely wipe out everyone who pursues such wickedness. Pharaoh ignores the warnings and it leads to judgement. There is something else that he repeatedly does in these chapters and that gives us a second lesson about judgement...]

Point #2 – Dismissing God's power leads to judgement.

When a person turns a blind eye to the unequaled ability of God to do all that He pleases, he or she will give little regard to His commands.

We find this repeated pattern with Pharaoh especially early on.

When God does a sign through Moses and Aaron, we see the Egyptian magicians are able to do similar things.

Aaron staff turns to a snake and we read this in **7:11**.

After the Lord devastates the Nile by **turning** it to blood it says this in **7:22**.

When frogs had come upon the land we are told in **8:7**.

How the magicians are able to reproduce these signs is not explained for us but there only appears to be two options, either they a magic tricks, that is they simply created the illusion of having power, or they are operating by the power of demons.

Whatever the case may the bible makes clear that the signs of the magicians are miniscule in comparison to the LORD.

They have staffs turn to snakes but their snakes are eaten.

Perhaps they turn a small container of water to blood, but not the whole Nile River.

While they can coax a few frogs but not enough to 'cover the land' like God does.

Their weakness is further emphasized in the fact that they have no power to bring an end to any of the things that God is doing.

God in His graciousness allows the Egyptians to dig along the Nile where they are able to find drinking water (7:24), but the magicians cannot change back the water in the river, the streams, canals, ponds, reservoirs, buckets, and jars.

When frogs come upon the land they also have no ability to drive the frogs back to where they had come from.

Further God does not allow these peddlers of idolatry to keep pace with Him very long.

When the LORD brings a plague of gnats His Word tells us this in **8:18-19**.

Removing any doubt whatsoever in the distinction God's makes between the Israelites and the Egyptians.

During the plagues of the flies, the death of livestock, the hail, and the darkness we are told that the Israelites are spared.

I'm inclined to think that happens during all the plagues which makes God's control over these things that much more plain.

Even though God is making His unlimited power plainly obvious to the King of Egypt, the king refuses to tremble before the LORD.

He uses the small displays of his magicians to shrug off the significance of the power of Almighty God.

[I know some people who like to fish. I myself have enjoyed times of fishing over the years. Most people who fish for a long time learn how to read the weather when they are on the lake and most have a healthy respect for its power. Only a great fool would look at a thunderstorm on the horizon and say "That's nothing!" and decide it is a good time to take his boat out on Lake Erie. Do you know what will happen to such a fool? He'll likely lose his boat or worse his life.]

Most people would shake their head at someone who ignored the power of the thunderstorm, but how many disregard the power of the One Who commands the storm?

God is the Creator and sustainer of every power in the whole universe, which means that His power is greater than all other powers combined.

And yet He is ignored.

People have been lulled into believing that God is not dangerous.

People live their lives as though God doesn't matter, as though He cannot do anything of any consequence.
That is a belief that leads to destruction.

[For those of us who know Christ it is essential to hold firmly to the truth that God's power is unequalled and that He will do all that He pleases. Don't be like the unbeliever who dismisses God's power and therefore gives no regard to His commands. Doing that long enough leads to a terrible place. The king of Egypt ends up there and I can think of no worse place to end up. He ignores God's warning, he dismisses God's power, and as a result he persists in his rebellion which shows us this third lesson concerning the judgement of the Lord...]

Point #3 – Persisting in rebellion makes God's judgement inescapable.

A continual refusal to repent from sin makes facing God's wrath unavoidable.

Through the first six, signs five of which are severe plagues upon the whole land of Egypt, I have counted seven times where we are told that Pharaoh hardened his heart towards the LORD.

That is true even after there is irrefutable proof that God is the One Who is in complete control of these plagues.

When the nation is completely helpless to do anything with the plague of frogs we read this in **8:8**.

Do you know what happens when Moses prays about the frogs? They die off.

Later when the flies are upon the land and the king can no longer bear it we are told this **8:28**.

Again God gives complete relief. It says in 8:31 that "not a fly remained."

Here they are totally helpless and at God's command the plague stops.

A number of scholars that I read on this passage tried to emphasize these things as naturally occurring events.

While I agree these are things present in creation, the magnitude and the timing of these events leaves no room for a natural explanation.

This king knows that these things are happening because God is causing them to happen.

God brings the plague and God can command their end at a moment's notice so that no one will mistake Who is doing these things.

Pharaoh knows this is God and yet seven times he digs his heels in and refuses to surrender to the King of universe.

God continues to bring plagues upon the land and after the plague of 'festering boils' it says in **9:12**.

Following the plague hail and the plague of locusts we read **10:20**.

Again after the three days of darkness which were so dark it says 'no one could see anyone else or leave his place' scripture says in **10:27**.

While it is important to think about the means by which God hardens the heart of the king, what is most important to see is that it makes the continuation of the plagues certain.

This man's judgement is inescapable.

And so it is for everyone who persists in rebelling against God.

[My experience with rollercoasters over the years has been somewhat mixed. One thing that is consistent is the point of no return. When I am standing in line looking at all that is before me I have the chance to get out of line. When I get to the boarding platform I could choose to step through the car and immediately proceed to the exit. When the bars are first locked and it has yet to move I could cry out in fear to let me off, but the moment the car leaves the boarding platform and begins to tick up that first hill, I am going whether I like it or not.]

Going past a point of no return is a real danger when it comes to living in rebellion against God.

The Lord is perfectly just in saying, "You have been warned enough! The warnings are over and judgment is coming."

One of the great hardships of preaching is when people refuse to listen.

Time and again the Word of God is opened and time and again people persist in disobeying what God has clearly commanded.

I warn you again this morning that judgement is coming and implore you to turn to God in repentance and faith in the atoning work of Jesus.

Someone might ask. "How do you know when it is too late?"

It is impossible for us in our limited understanding to say anything about the living, but I do know for sure that once Jesus comes or we breathe our last our fate is sealed.

We will either spend eternity under His wrath or delighting in His grace.

[The fact that God brings judgement against people who persist in rebellion is something that people struggle with. If people give any significant consideration to this subject it usually leads to the question of why. Why does God judge the rebellion of people? Couldn't He just let it go? The answer that comes from this passage is NO! While it is rightly an unhappy thought to consider unbelievers suffering in hell, if we are to have any appreciation for God at all we need to see this fourth point which is made plainly in our text...]

Point #4 – The glory of the LORD demands judgement.

Because God's goodness has neither limit nor beginning or end and because it is impossible for God to change, He must call to account every act of rebellion.

This is the plain meaning of what God says in 9:15-16.

Why go through all of these plagues and take all of this time?

God could simply make the Egyptians disappear from existence.

Instead of doing that He displays His power time and again, each time permitting/causing the king to persist in rebellion which in turn leads to another display of power.

Why? Look again at **verse 16**.

Notice this is about more than just the king knowing the power and might of the Lord, it is about His Name (Yahweh - The One Who Is) being proclaimed in all the earth.

Now turn to **10:1-2** and we will see there a similar line of thinking.

God's judgment upon those who remain in rebellion against Him serves the purpose of teaching His people the splendor of Who He is.

Step back for a moment and ask yourself is there such a thing as good and evil?

Is there such a thing as right and wrong?

I know it is really common for people to say and believe that good, evil, right, and wrong is subjective.

If that were true that no one would read a novel, watch a TV show, or go to a movie.

Can you think of a single example of any of those that doesn't portray good and evil in some sense?

I realize that people will define it differently but the pervasive presence of the concept tells us something of its existence in an objective sense.

Also, consider how passionate people become about what they believe to be right and wrong.

The very same people that scoff at the idea of God stand ready to tell you how to act and think.

Furthermore many of them become rather angry and want to see people punished if their sense of justice is violated.

In fact I would suggest to you that the level to which you think the violation of a law should be punished is a reflection on your perception of the value of the law.

[Have you ever crossed the street without using the crosswalk? Most of us are guilty of that one. How upset do you get if someone jaywalks in front of a police officer and the officer does nothing? Probably not very upset. Change the scenario, what if two people were trying to push someone you cared about into traffic to hurt them and the police officer did nothing? My guess is you would be rather upset because you place a high importance on laws designed to protect people from such things.]

Take that thought and apply it to the LORD's commands.

When we say that God should just ignore people who break His laws what are we saying about His laws?

It is inescapable we are saying His laws are unimportant.

Now we need to follow that one step farther because it is impossible to separate the law from the law giver.

It is reaching the height of human arrogance to declare to the Creator and Sustainer of everything that He makes bad laws that can be ignored.

Think of it another way, is a command of God good because He gives it, or does God give the commands He does because He is good?

God gives the commands He does because He is good and, therefore, if He must judge every action that breaks a command because it is impossible for Him to deny His own infinite goodness.

And because God is infinitely good, His judgement against unrepentant sinners is eternity in hell.

This is the biggest mistake people make when they rush to erase the doctrine of hell from the bible.

The thought of Hell is horrifying, the thought of what takes place here to all the Egyptians ought to weigh heavy upon our souls.

But trying to diminish or erase these things is like trying to diminish or erase the glory of God.

God never changes brothers and sisters and so His glory demands judgement.

That is what is so glorious about the cross.

God does not ignore a single act of disobedience by His people.

No, instead He gives His One and Only Son to pay the cost of our sin and so as it says in Romans 3:26 God is “just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”

That is what God is showing us through the king of Egypt.

He is showing us His judgement. Let us not take this lesson lightly.

Let us listen to His warnings and flee from our sin, let us consistently acknowledge His power in our hearts and minds, let us plead with others to turn from their persistent rebellion, and let us see God’s eternal and infinite glory in His Justice.