



Exodus (Part 14) – The Plagues, Part 2

Matt Chandler – November 27, 2016

[Video]

From darkness to light, this is the story we all share as the people of God. He draws us out to draw us in. From the birth of Israel to the church today, God delivers and dwells with his people. This story began several thousand years ago, and it began with a promise from God to Abraham that he would make his offspring more numerous than the stars in the sky, a great nation that would one day dwell in the Promised Land.

More than 400 years passed, and Abraham's descendants had not seen this promise fulfilled. Instead, the Israelites lived as foreigners in the land of Egypt. Fearing that the Hebrews would grow into a mighty nation and overtake them, the Pharaoh of Egypt forced them to work as slaves, but Israel continued to grow. In response, the Egyptians increased their oppression of God's people, and Pharaoh gave a terrible decree. Every son born to the Hebrews would be thrown into the river.

But a Levite couple defied this order, trusting God's will for their son's life, and God did have a plan for this child. Pharaoh's daughter found the baby and took pity on him. She named him Moses because he was drawn out of the water. As Moses grew older and saw the suffering of his people, anger burned within him. When he witnessed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, Moses killed the man and fled Egypt to hide in the desert.

Years passed, and Moses made a new life for himself in Midian. Then one day the voice of the Lord called out to him from a burning bush. God told Moses that he saw the persecution of his people in Egypt and he heard their cries. He promised to deliver the Israelites from slavery, and he commanded Moses to go before Pharaoh on their behalf. Moses was terrified, so God sent Moses' brother Aaron to go with him.

The brothers went before Pharaoh, performing signs and wonders, but Pharaoh would not listen, so God brought down plagues upon Egypt, yet Pharaoh's heart remained as hard as stone. To prepare for the tenth and final plague, the Hebrews marked their doors with the blood of spotless lambs. That night, the angel of death passed through the kingdom, killing the firstborn child of every Egyptian household that did not bear the mark, including Pharaoh's.

Heartbroken, Pharaoh told the Israelites to go. They were finally set free, and the Spirit of God led the people out and toward the Promised Land, but Pharaoh's grief soon turned to rage. He changed his mind and then commanded the Egyptian army to pursue them. When the Israelites came to the Red Sea, Moses lifted his staff to the sky and the waters parted.

The Hebrews passed through the towering waves, and the Egyptians were swallowed by the sea. God had indeed drawn his people out of bondage, out of darkness, and into the light of his presence. The story of Israel is the story of us today. We are God's people. He draws us out of our sin, our Egypt, and draws us into his presence into relationship with him.

[End of video]

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to start in Exodus 8:20. If you don't have a Bible with you, I want to encourage you to grab one of the hardback black ones somewhere around you. If you don't own one, that's our gift to you. Feel free to take that. I always think it's important, but especially this week...

We're going to cover a lot of Scripture together. In fact, we'll read here in a moment almost three chapters, which will be about 20 minutes of the message. We'll just be reading through the Scriptures. I want you to be able to see that. As I always like to say, I want you to see that I'm not making anything up, but we're just letting the Word of God read us as we read it.

Before we dive in, I want to lay this before you. Two years ago now, we felt as an elder board that we wanted... We're always thinking about, praying about, reading the Scriptures, and trying to figure out if we're doing all that we can do to help us mature as a body and to maximize the years God has given us together to serve him. About two years ago, we felt compelled in study and prayer to consider how we're planting churches and how we're helping other churches start.

In the middle of that, we began to consider and feel pulled toward what we called *campus transition*, which is to take some of our campuses and roll them off into autonomous churches. There's nothing humanly speaking that's wise about that. It's giving away millions of dollars of real estate and some of your most gifted and talented people, and it's purposefully shrinking the size of your own church, and yet, compelled by the Spirit of God, we stepped out in faith.

A little over a year ago now, the Denton Campus became The Village Church Denton that is no longer affiliated with us in any real way other than strong relational ties. They have flourished as an independent church with their own elder board, with their own deacons, with their own staff, with their own finances. They have flourished up in Denton. Now there has been all this stuff going on in the background that I want to lay before you today so that you might join us in prayer.

In January, our Fort Worth Campus will vote on whether or not they'll be the next campus to transition off of The Village Church and become an autonomous campus. As they listen to this today, no one is shocked in the room. If you're like, "How are they taking it?" we have had town hall meetings and all sorts of meetings around the Fort Worth Campus about this.

Denton voted at about 96 percent (which, I'm going to be honest, was a little bit offensive to me) to stop the stream and become an autonomous... I was hoping for, like, 80 or something like that. Does someone need me? But no, 96 percent. "Cut the cord. We're fine." How beautiful is it when mission takes precedent over the man, when a campus rolls off or when we plant a church, when we spend money sending people to the ends of the earth to herald the good news of the gospel to all who would hear?

These are things we need to learn to celebrate and love. In Flower Mound and in Plano and some of the others, we're not going to feel the Fort Worth transition, but they are us; we are them. They have come from us. So I want you to begin to pray with us as we're dealing with all sorts of things in the background. I want you to begin to pray that this transition would go smoothly.

We'll know more in January. They will vote in January, and then, depending on that vote, they could be autonomous starting in August. Every time that happens, I want us to learn to celebrate and be excited, because we are with our actions, not just with our mouths, saying that we believe in a kingdom that is bigger than The Village Church, and we believe in a faith that's going to the ends of the earth.

The model that we see in the New Testament is not one ever-increasing church at Jerusalem but, rather, an understanding that God is going to be known to the ends of the earth and a glad participation to that end. When my run with you is finished... I think I've promised you 40 years, as much as it depends on me. I can't control being alive or not being alive.

When our 40 years are up together, to look out on the horizon and see hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of new churches that have been started all over the world would be such a better legacy than one gargantuan monster church that some poor slack has to come in and try to manage. So ultimately, will you pray with us to these ends so that we might once again celebrate that the mission is greater than any one place and that God is serious about the ends of the earth knowing and hearing the beauty of his grace.

So last week we started the plagues, which was kind of fun. This week we'll wrap up all the plagues but Passover. We're going to save Passover for next weekend. It'll be a weekend unto itself. We said last week that the plagues were a response to a question Pharaoh asked. It was God in his mercy (not just in his wrath but in his mercy) answering a question that Pharaoh, who is a man of our times... In fact, what Pharaoh shows us is that humankind doesn't have a tendency to change at all. As progressive as we might think we are, we don't tend to change very much.

We highlighted this question that Pharaoh asked Moses in Exodus, chapter 5, verse 2. Here's Pharaoh's question, and it is, if we're honest, oftentimes *our* question. **"But Pharaoh said, 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice...'"** Then he adds on what God directly asked him: to let Israel go. The question is a very postmodern question, right? It's a very 2016/2017 American question. "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?"

What you're going to find predominately in American culture is we're not hostile toward the idea of there being a God or there being spiritual realities. In fact, in the last census, only 3.1 percent of Americans identified as atheist, which means 97 percent of Americans think there's some sort of spiritual dimension or spiritual reality to life as we know it. We worship a God. We serve a God. We consider that there is a God, and yet this question, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him?" haunts us even as evangelicals.

It's like we can tolerate the idea of God as long as he minds his own business. It's like we can tolerate this idea of who God is as long as he never asks us to do things that make us uncomfortable

or calls us into spaces that we would have to fully trust him and that we doubt that happiness might be found in that path.

It's fine to believe in God as long as God has no real authority or say in the everyday functions of our lives. Then when he *does* have that say, we get jostled, because deep down, honestly, we think we'd make a better god than he would. I've never met anybody who would say that, but we certainly behave that way.

"I know what God is saying, but I just think I'm smarter. I know I had to do the eighth grade twice, but if you take *that* out, I think I've done a pretty good job of managing my life. Sure, there's *this* failure, *this* failure, and the fact that no one has lied to me like I have, no one has betrayed me like I have, no one has stabbed me in the back as brutally, as ruthlessly, and as consistently as I have, but if you throw all that out, I'm pretty awesome."

In the middle of this question, God in his mercy begins to flex and show the answer to this question. "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" We watched last week in the first three plagues God expose the Egyptian gods as being no real gods at all, and the places in which the people of Egypt and Pharaoh himself had built their hopes were unable to bear the weight of those hopes.

We saw last week that God turned the Nile into blood and killed all the fish in the Nile. I can't re-preach last week's sermon, but the god Hapi (the irony is not lost on me) was the Egyptian god of fullness of life. It was the god that was supposed to make life not thin but thick, not shallow but deep. When God flexes over the Nile, he's saying to Egypt and to Pharaoh, "This god is no god at all. It cannot give you the life you desire."

Do you remember the "Coke is life" commercial, where everyone is hot and happy and no one ever suffers and you're eating crap that you can't eat and stay hot, but you're doing it? This is the life we want. God is going, "It won't be found here." Then he exposes the idea of purpose, the god Heqet who had a frog face. He lets frogs consume Egypt. There wasn't a place to step or lie down that there weren't frogs, and there was nothing they could do about it. It was God's way of saying, "Listen, purpose won't be found where you think it'll be found. It's only found in full surrender to me."

Lastly, we looked at the gnats. If Texans know about anything it's gnats and flies (we'll get to the flies in a moment), how they can ruin and destroy everything. It was this idea of comfort, where the

Egyptians had in their wealth and in their power... Imagine. For us, Egypt is some far-off Middle-Eastern kind of country, but in this day they were the most powerful nation the world had ever known in this point in human history.

If you look at their art, they projected this image of comfort and wealth, and yet God was showing them in the gnats that the comfort the soul is really hungry for will only be found in the Creator of the soul and that everything under the sun was given to actually create worship but not to be worshiped in and of itself. If we want that kind of deep-level peace and comfort for our souls, it will be found in the Creator of our souls and nowhere else.

That leads us to the rest of the plagues. I know you're really excited coming off of Thanksgiving to get into the judgment of God and the destruction of the natural order, so we'll dive into that. Let me give you my outline. In answering the question of, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" here's God's response in the plagues.

First, *the Lord is the true God*. We're going to talk about that at length. *The Lord is the mighty Creator*. Those two go together. Then *the Lord is a just judge*. That's wildly unpopular in 2016. And finally, *the Lord is a gracious savior*. So who is the Lord? *That* is the Lord. We'll dive into that, but before we do, we're going to read a lot of Bible together.

I know we are an overstimulated culture, so this might seem to you to be like, "Really? We're going to read for 15 minutes? I'm not a child." I certainly don't think you are. I wouldn't try to read for 15 minutes to you. Let's look at this together. These are the words of God to us as his people, starting in verse 20.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me. Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand.'""

Keep in mind the gnats just left. We haven't had 24 hours without the gnats, and here come the flies.

"But 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 the LORD in the midst of the earth." I pointed out last week that in every plague you'll see some variation of that sentence: "So

that you might know that I am the Lord." "So that you might know that I am the Lord" is the answer to Pharaoh's question, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" Look at verse 23.

"Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.' And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies. Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, 'Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.' But Moses said, 'It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians.'"

What the Lord demands of all of us is complete surrender. What happens when that demand comes is we tend to squirm under it, because we're far more confident in *us* than we are in *him* despite evidence that we can't trust ourselves. What happens is God will demand complete surrender and we offer him something other than. The demand on Pharaoh is to let the people of God go three days into the wilderness where they will hold a feast and make sacrifice to their God, that he is to let them *all* go.

Do you see Pharaoh's counteroffer? Have you ever tried to buy a house where you put in the offer that's ridiculous? They're like, "180,000." You're like, "\$5." Then they counter with, "No, no, \$179,000." You're like, "\$15." This is what Pharaoh is trying to do right now. He's like, "Okay, look, I'm done with the fly nonsense, so here's what we're going to do. Go ahead and make sacrifice to your God, but do it here. You're not leaving. Just make sacrifices here." But God doesn't do the back-and-forth thing. Look at verse 27.

"We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us.' So Pharaoh said, 'I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me.' Then Moses said, 'Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.'

So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. And the LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me. For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, behold, the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die.'"

And the LORD set a time, saying, 'Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land.' And the next day the LORD did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died. And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.' So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh.

And Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me. For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.'"
There it is again. There's that line that's in all of the plagues. "You want to know who I am that you would have to obey my voice? 'So that you might know.'" There it is again. Look at verse 15.

"For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go.

Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been

in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.'

Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt.' Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth.

And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast.

And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail. Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.'

Moses said to him, 'As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's.'" There it is again. "But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God." This is an interesting text. "(The flax and the barley were struck down, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the emmer were not struck down, for they are late in coming up.)"

Let me explain what's happening here, because it's something that happens a lot. In the middle of turbulent or difficult seasons, usually brought on by our own sinfulness, there is what appears to be repentance but is no real repentance at all. It's actually what the Bible would call *worldly sorrow*. My mom would say it like this: "Are you upset that you got caught or are you upset at what you did?"

In Pharaoh's case, he's upset that he got caught, but he certainly isn't repentant to the Lord. He

doesn't understand that he has sinned against God, although he's using that language. He's now taking on our language in order to manipulate and try to control. "I'm in the wrong. I repent." But there isn't real repentance or he would start to walk in obedience. There is no obedience. There's just sadness at the consequences of his sin.

Moses sees it and calls it out. He even brings out what's happened to the crops. "Half the crops have been destroyed, but the other half are late coming up. You know this, so you're trying to barter a deal with God. You're not actually surrendering to God." Pharaoh is squirming under the demand of full surrender.

He wants halfhearted surrender, not full surrender. He wants to give part of his life to this God and keep the other part for himself. Remember, Pharaoh thinks, in a sense, he is a living god himself, which seems absurd for us, and yet we ourselves oftentimes think we are a better god than God himself. Verse 33:

"So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and stretched out his hands to the LORD, and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth. But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.'"

This is an interesting take. It's the first time we see a new idea interjected into God laying upon the Egyptians judgment that is due their injustices. What God is saying in this text is that his actions are not just a judgment upon the people of Egypt but are also meant to embolden Israel in their confidence in the God they serve, so that in the generations to come they would be able to remember the power of God on their behalf and would be rooted in a confidence in the goodness and kindness of their God.

He's saying, "Go tell Pharaoh this, and remember this is not just my judgment on them, but you're going to tell your sons and your grandsons how I, with mighty power, delivered you from bondage, slavery, oppression, and injustice." So Moses does it. Look at verse 3.

"So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and said to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me. For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country, and they shall cover the face of the land, so that no one can see the land.

And they shall eat what is left to you after the hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours that grows in the field, and they shall fill your houses and the houses of all your servants and of all the Egyptians, as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.'"

Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh. Then Pharaoh's servants said to him, 'How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?' So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. And he said to them, 'Go, serve the LORD your God. But which ones are to go?'"

This is once again that game we like to play, where what God says is, "I want full obedience" and we say, "Uh, you know, I get what you're trying to do, like, I can kind of see the big picture. I took this Bible study class once, so I understand it. I so appreciate what you're doing in the world with all your kindness and goodness, but here's the deal, man. If I do that, that's not economically going to be a good decision for me. If I do that, people are going to think I'm a weirdo. So how about this? How about I do this?" And they send back a counteroffer to God.

This is the second time. So now we're in this game where the lowball offer comes in. "We're going to give you \$5 for your \$180,000 house," and they fire back, "Okay, \$179,000. I can't go any lower than \$179,000 without losing my own shirt." Now Pharaoh has another counteroffer, despite the fact the Lord didn't listen to his first one. He comes back and says, "All right, \$20. That's all I can do. I can just do \$20. Do we have a deal?" Let's just look at what happens. What's the response to this counteroffer? Look at verse 12.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, so

that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.' So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts.

The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again. They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, 'I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. Now therefore, forgive my sin, please, only this once, and plead with the LORD your God only to remove this death from me.' So he went out from Pharaoh and pleaded with the LORD. And the LORD turned the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea. Not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt. But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go.

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 toward 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 also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.' 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.'"

I love that passage. Here's why. We practice obedience rooted in faith. The big plan here at this point is, "Go out three days' journey into the desert and hold a festival and sacrifices to me," but they don't even know what that means yet. When Pharaoh says, "Go, but don't take your animals," Moses has to go, "I know this is going to sound crazy, but we don't exactly know what we're going to

do when we get there. We just know he's getting us out of Egypt, so we're heading out. We have to take everything, because we don't know what God is going to ask of us once we get there."

You shouldn't feel overly concerned when the Lord is asking you to take those steps of faith where you're not quite sure how it's going to play out, because this is how God has always dealt with his people. Nobody gets the full plan right before them. In fact, we like to project that plan, which is why we live in such constant disappointment.

We have this plan for our lives, and all of a sudden we're disappointed. We're like, "God, how come you didn't give me my plan?" Well, because it's not *his* plan. He's smarter than you, which is wildly unpopular to think. Let's finish up this last plague. Verse 27: **"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.'"**

There are four things that are happening in these passages of Scripture that are God answering the question, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" By the way, the works around this of Tim Chester and Dr. Motyer (two brilliant PhDs) were super helpful in the history of the plagues and the Egyptian culture around the plagues. Here's what we're learning around why obey the voice of the Lord.

1. *The Lord is the true God.* In each of these plagues, there's a corresponding Egyptian god, and the people of Egypt, and I would even argue the people of Israel, had in a very real way built the rhythms of their lives around seeking to appease these gods and earn the favor of these gods. When they're making sacrifice to these gods, it's not for atonement of sin but to try to win their favor.

When they're sacrificing to Hapi, when they're sacrificing to Apis, when they're sacrificing to these gods, they're trying to earn their favor and to appease their wrath so that they might be blessed, and God is exposing them as being no real god at all. The god of the Nile was not able to control the Nile, because the Lord is God. He is the only true God. Here's what he's revealing. Even Pharaoh himself becomes this central figure of God trying to communicate something to us.

Here's Pharaoh. Pharaoh is what you and I will never be. Pharaoh has all the power that exists. He can do whatever he wants. He has such stunning wealth as to make Bill Gates look like a beggar.

Think about those shows you watch on Discovery about the treasures of Egypt, and that's stuff they just buried those dudes with. That's not even the stuff that was left for the next guy.

So this stunning amount of wealth, all power, all prestige, all position. He can do whatever he wants, and yet the picture of Pharaoh we see as creation starts to unravel around him is a man who's hardened, bitter, angry, and starting to realize that for all his power, all his wealth, all his ingenuity, he can't stop the hand of God and can't establish his own kingdom.

Now think about that. We like to consider ourselves progressives. I don't mean that politically. I know we're in Texas. I saw some of you reach for your CHL. "I'll show you progressive, boy. You're in Texas. I know you're from the Bay Area originally. We don't do that nonsense here." I don't mean that. I mean that we look at these people and we think, "How silly they are for worshiping these false gods."

Listen. I've been the pastor here for 14 years in two weeks. Here's what I know. You couldn't convince me that some of you aren't worshipping at the altar of economic success. That was Apis, the bull god, the one that was assaulted and killed in the livestock dying. That was the god of economic success. You can't convince me that in this area of Dallas there aren't plenty worshipping that false god even to this day.

You want to talk worshipping comfort or power or control? These are gods we still worship. They're not golden images in our homes, but instead they're cars we can't afford and neighborhoods we can't afford to live in and people we try to use up as commodities, and on and on I could go. We're not better than these people. We *are* these people.

I tried to point out that the call to full surrender has made Pharaoh squirm. Think about what it would be like to go, "Okay, I'm just going to live life the way the Lord asked me to live it." That's a terrifying proposition to those of us who feel gifted and able. We just feel like we know better than God does. There's so much evidence that we don't, but we can't see that evidence.

We take credit for all the good in our lives and pawn off all the bad, either to other people or God himself. It's one of the ways we can see that we're really wicked people. Because all the good we did, all the beautiful things in our lives we helped put in place, we accomplished. Anything bad either someone else did to us or God didn't give us what we were owed.

You see this anytime there's tragedy. I use the illustration of a plane crash. I've never come across the person like, "How are you doing today, bro?" "I'm just worshiping Jesus. Did you know every plane that took off in the world today landed? Nobody got hurt. Praise God for that." But let one fall out of the sky... "Where was God? How cruel is God?" This is us. It's how we get exposed.

2. *The Lord is the mighty Creator.* The Lord harnesses all of creation against Pharaoh, every bit of it...land, sea, animals, plants. Everything obeys him, because he is the creator God. This is tied to that first point, as the Lord *is* the only true God. Here's the argument from Scripture, and I believe it's also a bit of an intellectual argument, although I'm more interested in the spiritual argument, although I don't know that I necessarily want to pit those two as being separate things. Let me show you what the Scripture says about these things.

Psalm 96:5 says, "**For all the gods of the peoples [people groups] are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens.**" Nehemiah would help us flesh out the argument. Nehemiah 9:6 says, "**You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.**"

Here's the argument from Scripture, and it's an argument that I think holds a lot of sway. If there is a creator God, then he's God and there aren't other gods. If you look back on human history, almost everybody has a creation narrative. The Christian creation narrative is distinct. It is different. We don't believe in these dualistic, multiple gods that are doing battle for goodness and righteousness and creation is an overflow of their violence against one another.

No, we believe that out of the overflow of harmony, community, and peace within the Godhead...God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit...there was an overflow out of that perfection onto the canvas of creation, and if it were not fractured by sin and death, the shalom peace and beauty of the natural order would be breathtaking. There would be no death, no anxiety, no fear. The Bible describes that as being naked and unashamed, having no secrets and never feeling shame. That's our starting point.

If there is a creator God, how could you worship Ra, the sun god, like the Egyptians were doing, if the creator God created the sun? How could you worship the god of the valley or the god of the mountain or the god of *this* part of the world or the god of *this* part of the world when God is the

creator God? If there is a creator, that creator is God and there are no other gods. That's the argument that's being made here.

3. *The Lord is a just judge.* This is hard stuff. Look at Exodus 9:8. "**And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh.'**" This becomes boils. I always love this one, because there's no word of warning to Pharaoh. It would honestly be kind of a cool scene in a movie. Moses just picks up some soot, sees Pharaoh, makes eye contact, and just throws it in the air, like LeBron James and the powder before a Cavaliers game, and it becomes boils on man and beast.

Let me tell you why this is a sign of the just justice of God. If you remember back to the early part of our study in Exodus, when God was allowing the people of Israel to multiply per his promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15... Pharaoh saw that multiplication and hated it and sought to destroy the people of God. He has their sons thrown into the Nile. He hard-presses them with heavy labor.

Do you remember the heavy labor he required? He had them gather the straw and bake bricks in these ovens, and where they would not and could not produce the number of bricks impossibly demanded he had them beaten and killed. There was a full-on genocide levied against the people of God. How is judgment pronounced on those people? By grabbing the ashes of Pharaoh's judgment on the people of God and throwing it into the air.

Despite the oversensitivity of our world, I just want to lay before you what's true and right. God hates sin, and he's serious about it. There are great efforts being made to take all the teeth out of God's mouth and paint this picture almost something like Tinker Bell. He has a bag of goodness on his hip and he just kind of flutters around. He's a white guy with feathered hair, despite the fact that he's from the Middle East, and he just sprinkles pixie dust on everyone. They flutter about in gladness, and he's never upset about anything and he never gets angry.

You can't have love without wrath. They can't exist without one another. To be in love is to have the capability to be angry at anything that would violate or destroy what you love. If you're a parent, you understand this. The first time I held Audrey was the first time I realized I could kill someone. If you tried to destroy my daughter, harm my daughter, there would be wrath in me, right and just wrath. Why? Wrath is birthed out of love.

That's why love is such a difficult doctrine, the idea of love. To say, "Well, God is love," I would wholeheartedly agree with you as long as you're willing to acknowledge that to love something deeply is to have the possibility of wrath blowing out of that love, flowing out of that love. When we watch God's justice being poured out on the Egyptians, it is birthed in his deep and abiding love for human flourishing.

Under Egypt's rule, under their genocide, under their tyranny, what he designed and created to flourish was being torn apart, desecrated, destroyed, and he stepped in in justice and judged them rightly. Now what we like to do is think we're different than Egypt, and yet the Bible is pretty clear that everyone in this room, pastor included, prefers creation over the Creator. Can we just be straight? Sometimes we just want God's stuff. We don't really want God, but his stuff is kind of cool.

We'd rather take his stuff, which immediately dooms us to some spaces, because everything God created was created to increase our worship of God. If you just take God's stuff and you don't get God, you actually rob yourself of joy and meaning. Let's just be straight. I'd love to have this on a couch, just talking about life and how this plays out in our individual lives. All of us think at different times that we're better rulers over our lives than God would be. I do. You do. We all just do. That's what Romans 1 says.

All of us, like I've already said, fail to acknowledge the goodness of God in our lives. We fail to give him praise for our intuitive gifts and abilities. We fail to give him praise on the opportunities he has set up for us, the gifts and talents he has given us, the opportunity he has provided for us. We honestly become experts in what we don't have as opposed to those who praise God for all the good that we do. This leads to all sorts of rebellion against God, and God is not pleased.

By the way, you're like, "I thought church was supposed to be a place of gladness. I feel worse than when I came in." Okay. Well, thanks for bringing that up. Let's turn the corner now. That brings me to my fourth point about what we're learning.

4. *The Lord is a gracious savior.* Look at Exodus 8:22-23. **"But 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 the LORD in the midst of the earth. Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen."**

The people of God endured the first three plagues just like the Egyptians did, and then starting with

the fourth plague through the tenth, the tenth being Passover (we'll talk about that next week), God puts a hedge of protection around his people, and they do not experience the wrath of God like the Egyptians are.

Here's my question. Why? Are the Israelites better than the Egyptians? Are they purer? Are they more righteous? Have they pursued the Lord with more vigor? The answer from the text is most assuredly not at all. They're not. In fact, they are a stiff-necked, foolish people that God loves.

Just to point out how silly they are and jump ahead to the spring, after they get out of Egypt to make this sacrifice to the Lord, do you know what they do? They get scared. They don't know what to do, so they melt all their gold and build a golden calf. Do you know what the golden calf was? Apis, the Egyptian god of economic prosperity.

These fools watched God kill that no-god-at-all and deliver them, and they make a golden calf and worship it and give *it* praise for delivering them out of bondage. These are morons, and yet God builds a hedge of protection around them, provides for them, cares for them, delivers them, saves them. Why? Well, the apostle Paul will help us in Romans 9. People love Romans 8. They love Romans 11. They tend to skip over 9 and 10. I'm not scared of 9 and 10. Let's look at it. Romans 9, starting in verse 15. This is all in reference to what we just read and more.

"For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" Verse 16 is a linchpin kind of verse. "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills."

I know that makes people anxious. It shouldn't. It should make your heart happy. Here's why. What the Scriptures just unpacked to us is that the compassion and mercy of God poured out on the Israelites and poured out on you and me as Christians was not earned by us in any way but was freely given while we were at our worst, which is why Christians, of all people, should be marked by compassion and mercy, slow to anger and abounding in love, because that's what we've been recipients of.

The narrative of us as a judgmental people should be in the hearts of lost people whose own sin has pricked their heart and makes them feel convicted, but we should be known by love, compassion, and mercy. No Christian should walk with a judgmental swagger, because we did not work out our own salvation. It was given by a God of compassion and mercy.

Maybe you're here today and you're reading what I just read and thinking, "Oh, well, maybe I'm just one of those guys, one of those gals, whose heart is just hardened toward the Lord." I want to say, just plead with you for a second, disagree with you, that you being here today is probably an objective evidence to something else altogether. You being here today is an objective evidence of God being a gracious savior.

You've heard what we've talked about. You've seen what we've pointed out, that, yes, God is a just judge, but he's also a gracious savior, and that's not built upon you and what you do or don't do; it's built on full surrender to him as our Lord and Savior. It's not about where you've been or what you're up to or what you struggle with or what you're wrestling through. No, no, no. The call here is full surrender to a gracious Savior.

Now you can, like Pharaoh, choose to harden your heart. It happens all the time. It's why as long as we're in the Bible Belt together I want to plead with you. Church is a lame hobby. You should get a boat. Take up paintball or hunting or something. You put yourself in harm's way when you attend church and have no serious inclination to follow the Lord, because every time you hear the Word of God and do nothing with what you've heard, you play the role of Pharaoh and actively harden your own heart toward the Lord.

It's why, for the life of me, I'll never understand those of you who have no real relationship with the Lord but feel some sort of moral obligation to attend church every weekend. It's this strange, awful, Bible-Belt veneer that's so damning and devastating to your own soul and to the name of Christ. The call is 100 percent obedience, and no one is going to be able to execute that, which is why him being such a gracious Savior is such good news.

I just want to end with this. In the book of Hebrews, once again referencing back to all of this we just read, the writer of Hebrews says, "**As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'**" Be inquisitive. Track down your questions. If there are barriers or hurdles to believe, to surrender... All I'm saying is not that you just mash those down. No, I'm saying lean in.

Grab a friend. Grab your Christian buddy and go, "Hey, help me understand this. I'm always confused by this. What do I do with this? What does full obedience even look like? I don't even know what surrender looks like. What's he talking about?" Be inquisitive. Hunt him down. As the Lord pursues you, pursue back. Seek to make sense of things.

You should want this to be true: moving from thin to thick life, shallow to deep life, this promise from Christ that in him is life to the full, forgiveness of all sin, past, present struggles, future screwups all in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. We should want this to be true. Lean in. Get your questions answered. Get curious about the things of God.

Don't just harden your heart and go, "Well, that was long. Did that dude just read to us for 30 minutes?" Be inquisitive about faith. Ask a lot of questions. Get to the bottom of your hurdles. Do you think the Lord is offended that you have questions? He knows he's infinite and we're not. He knows we're going to have some. I'm just saying pursue; don't harden. **"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."** Let's pray.

Father, thank you for these men and women, for the time off this past week, for the opportunity to read a giant chunk of your Scriptures and let it bear its weight on us. I do pray that you would help us. Where we don't know what this looks like, where we're not sure what all of this means, I just pray that you would spark in our hearts a desire to be serious about little baby steps of obedience rooted in faith, that where we have a tendency to think everything needs to be laid out for us before we can embrace you, like we see Moses and the Israelites... We don't know what the Lord will ask. We just know we need to take this one step. So help us. We need you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.