

Exodus 5-7 • No straw for bricks and let the plagues begin

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Good evening to you again. We are in Exodus. I think there's some good stuff here this evening. Let's pray.

Lord, we open our hearts to You that we might be recipients, receivers of Your Word. And we know Lord God, that the dynamic here is a spiritual one, not just an intellectual one. And so we pray Lord for that spiritual receptivity.

We pray that our hearts would be open to hear Your voice, to respond to You, to apply Your Word to our lives. Guide us, we pray. We ask it in Jesus name, amen. Amen.

All right. Chapter 5, verse 1 begins by saying, *“Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’”*² *But Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.’”* (ESV)

I want you to stop there for just a moment, and the reason I want to stop there and talk for just a moment to you, is because I want you to notice here in the narrative, just up to this point, that Pharaoh wastes no time getting to the real issue.

And what I mean by that is, in ancient Egypt, as with, not just Egypt, there were other countries as well, but in ancient Egypt, Pharaoh was considered a god in his own right. All right? And worthy of worship. So his natural question, when Moses and Aaron come waltzing into his presence and say, the God of the Hebrews says, let my people go.

His natural question is, what God could possibly be superior to me? Because, he has bought into this whole idea that he is a god. And so he's thinking to himself, what gives this God, your God, the right to tell me what I should be compelled to do? Especially when it's something I don't want to do. It's one thing when God comes along and tells you to do something you want to do. You're like, okay, cool. But when God comes along and cramps your style and tries to get

you to do something you don't want to do, we all can be a little bit like Pharaoh in this sense. But let me just explain here why I'm emphasizing this about Pharaoh.

You might be thinking, well, who cares. Pharaoh, he was a king that lived a long time ago, what's that have to do with me? Well, I'll tell you what it has to do with you because these are not just the random thoughts of some Pharaoh from the past. These are the burning questions that go through the hearts and minds of all human beings.

Because you see, ever since the enemy dangled the possibility of being like a god in front of Adam and Eve, this has been a prevailing question. And the question is, is someone or, is something more important than my own self-interest? You see, self-interest, we just take it for granted. We go through our day filled with self-interest and we think nothing of it.

And we watch movies where the people are telling one another in the movie, you need to follow your heart. You just need to do what makes you happy. And we hear these things, and we're just like, yeah, well that's what people say. That's what the world thinks, and we understand it. And to a large degree, we've even embraced some of it ourselves.

The point of all this is that, all those comments, all those statements, all those things that we hear in movies, every day and the way we think ourselves, every day, is all part of the self-life, which sets me up as God of my own existence.

And you might not even think about it that way. You probably don't. Yeah, I'm sure you don't get up in the morning thinking, Well, I'm God of my own existence, and here I go, and I'm going to be making decisions today as God. No, you don't think that, neither do I.

But we do step out on a regular basis and do our own thing, regardless of how God may feel about it. We don't think twice about asking God about half the decisions we make in life. And so you see that same essence, that same idea of asking the question, is someone or is something more important than my own self-interest? This is not limited to this little measly Pharaoh who died a long, long time ago. This is a pervasive question of mankind and everybody has to grapple with it.

And even once you come to Christ, even after you become a born again believer, it doesn't mean that you've necessarily answered this question in a way

that is going to benefit you. We still grapple with it, and as believers, we grapple with it on a continual basis.

It's called the challenge of lordship and the question of whether we're going to bow the knee to Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, or whether I'm going to continue to be lord of my own life. It's just part of who we are. Because, we have this gravitational pull to be our own master, our own lord, to call our own shots.

This is an important statement and I would really challenge you to think it through. Because you see, there is someone who is more important than your own self-interest, and that, of course, is Jesus.

He comes along, and He tells you things like, you've been bought with a price. You are no longer your own. (1 Corinthians 6:20) He purchased you with His shed blood on the cross and you now belong to Him. It puts life into a completely different perspective. It just changes everything about the way we think about who we are and what rights and privileges that I have in my own life to exercise my own freedoms, as it were.

And one of the reasons I also share this with you is not just for your own life, but those of you who like to witness, those of you who love to just share Jesus with other people, this is a good thing for you to remember when you're witnessing. Cause you're because you're going to run into the same attitude, if you haven't already.

You're talking to people about Jesus and telling them the good news, and they're like, what does that have to do with me? Because I am in charge of my own self-interest, and you're coming and telling me that I should be interested in this person, this Jesus that you're talking about. Well, how does that serve my interests? That's the question. That's the burning question in people's hearts and minds. Not just yours, in everybody's, so there you go. Alright, let's keep going.

Verse 3. *"Then they said, 'The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.'"* I'm not really sure where that statement came from. I don't... There's no record of God saying that to Moses and Aaron, and I don't know if they just threw that in there for effect or what.

It says, *"⁴ But the king of Egypt said to them, 'Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens.'"* ⁵ And

Pharaoh said, “Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens!”

⁶ The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, (by the way, the foremen were Jews) ⁷ “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸ But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ ⁹ Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.”

This is the way Pharaoh perceived what Moses and Aaron was saying to them about letting the people go. He thought it was just a made up thing, it was a big lie. And you see, he couldn't imagine an authority above his own, and so he naturally concluded that this whole matter was a figment of their imagination brought on by the fact that these guys just have too much free time on their hands. They've just got too much time to sit around and dream and come up and concoct with all these weird ideas about their God.

And Pharaoh's like, I'm their God, so here's what we need to do. We need to get them busier than they were before so they don't have time to sit and think about these dumb things. There you go. That's the solution.

Verse 10. *“So the taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw. ¹¹ Go and get your straw yourselves wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced in the least.’” ¹² So the people were scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. ¹³ The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, your daily task each day, as when there was straw.” ¹⁴ And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, “Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today and yesterday, as in the past?”*

¹⁵ Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, “Why do you treat your servants like this? ¹⁶ No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people.” ¹⁷ But he said, “You are idle, you are idle; that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’ ¹⁸ Go now and work. No straw will be given you, but you must still deliver the same number of bricks.” ¹⁹ The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble when they said, “You shall by no means reduce your number of bricks, your daily task each day.” ²⁰ They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from

Pharaoh; (how do you think this is going to go?) ²¹ and they said to them, "The Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.""
You think they're just a little bit discouraged?

"Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? ²³ For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all." In other words, do You have a problem keeping Your Word? Is that what's going on here?

In case you're wondering, this is commonly referred to as a crisis point. And it's that point in life where you finally make a decision, and a determination that you're going to trust the Lord. You're going to obey the Lord. You're going to do what He wants.

And so you cry out to Him with all your heart and you give yourself to Him. And what happens? Things get worse. Now, what are you going to do? That's the question. Because that's what a crisis point does for us. It creates that question. Now, what am I going to do?

Let me tell you something. If I had a dollar for every person that I've ever spoken to or heard from who found themselves at this very crisis point, let me tell you, let me tell you.

There always comes a point in the life of every believer when they are forced to grapple with the question. Do I believe God is good or not? Because you can read it in your Bible all you want, but when circumstances in life don't work out like you thought they should and you come to that crisis point, it's all going to come back up again.

And then you come to church thinking maybe they're going to get some answers here, but you're upset and you don't really want to talk to people. And then what's the first thing that you sit down in church and you're like, okay, God, you better say something that's going to change my attitude here or you're in trouble. I might just pull my worship. That'll show you.

And then the worship leader starts singing that song, you're a good, good Father. And you're like, I don't know if I can sing that song. There's a song, I don't know if you know who Hillary Scott is, but there's a song that she recorded a number of years ago called, Thy Will. Some of you may know of it. Some of the lyrics go like this. "I know you're good, but this don't feel good right now."

And I know that's not grammatically correct, don't write me a letter. That's the way the lyrics go. The song actually goes on to say, "Sometimes I got to stop, remember that you're God, and I am not."

I love that song because it's a song from, that expresses the cry of the heart at that crisis point. And she was going through things in her own life that led her, brought her to that crisis point of faith.

And if you're waiting for me to explain why God allows these crisis points in our lives, the only explanation that I can give is that it is a test of your faith. Remember hearing that on the radio? This is a test of the emergency broadcast system. Well, this is a test of the emergency faith system. Yeah, and it's a challenging one to be sure. Let me show you what James said about tests. It says,

James 1:2-4 (NIV84)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, (these are those crisis points of faith) because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. (and) Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

You see, there's a point to those tests that come along in our lives that test our faith. Those times in our life when we come to that crisis point, and then the writer of Hebrews also shares some interesting insights. Check this out. He says,

Hebrews 12:5-11 (ESV)

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Hebrews 12:5-11 (ESV)

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline (or that word means, training) of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, (at some point or another) then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they (meaning our earthly fathers) disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. (here’s the deal though) For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

And so this is the issue right there. God is using those difficult points of crisis that you're going through and the hardship that comes from those things, as a mechanism in your life to bring about maturity and the fruit of righteousness, that's the point.

And Moses obviously has a lot to learn here. He's going to learn it. But he's an 80 year old man and he's just learning. I mean, he's really just starting to walk with God when you think about it. He's, in fact, he's pretty new in the sense of walking with the Lord.

And so he comes to this crisis point and what does he do? He questions God. He says, what is this? First of all, number 1., I didn't ask for this job. Number 2., I tried really hard to get out of it, You wouldn't let me. Number 3, You told me I was going to come here and there was going to be a deliverance. But yet, what's happening? It's not happening, and You have not delivered Your people at all.

And so you can see that Moses had an expectation. And that's the problem, Christians, is that when we go through issues of life, we have our own expectations of how God is or should act on our behalf.

And when those expectations are not met, we fall apart, usually. At least in the early days of our walk with the Lord, let's say, we're very prone to falling apart and questioning what's going on. What is going on here? I thought God loved me. I thought God cared about me. I thought God was good. Like Hillary saying, but this don't feel good.

Chapter 6. *"But the LORD said to Moses, 'Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.'"*

² *God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, (and by the way, that's the, Hebrew El Shaddai) but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them."*

The idea of what He's saying to Moses here is that He will now be revealing Himself to the nation of Israel in ways that He had never revealed himself to them before. And He's talking about the upcoming hand of God that is going to be felt very strongly there in Egypt.

He says, in verse 4, *"I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. ⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶ Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.'"*

Stop there for just a minute. Are you noticing how the Lord is speaking to Moses at this juncture of this point of crisis that Moses is having and He's emphasizing what He's going to do?

Are you noticing how many of the personal pronouns here are being used? Look at their beginning in verse 6. *"I am the LORD, ... I will bring you out ... I will deliver ... I will redeem you with an outstretched arm..."* Do you see what He's doing?

He's coming back to Moses and saying, listen, I made a promise, this is going to happen. I know your expectations have aren't being met specifically as you think this thing ought to play out. But I will do this, right? I will do this.

Now, look what He goes on, He's not done yet. Verse 7. He says, *"I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸ I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD."*

Wow!. He's emphasizing this over and over and over again. Now you would think after a speech like that, Moses is going to back and say, okay, all right, got it. I heard you loud and clear. Sorry, I wiggled out there for a little bit, but now I'm going to..., we're just going to trust in You with all of our hearts. But that doesn't always happen that way. Does it? Sometimes hardship can really put your heart into a tailspin.

And so it says here in verse 9, *"Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery."*

And that's an important thing to remember, you guys, especially when you're witnessing to somebody; you're telling somebody about the good news of Jesus. If that person has gone through a lot of hardship in their lives, and a lot of people have, I mean, serious hardship.

You need to understand hardship can create a barrier to people hearing the Word of God, but it doesn't have to. I didn't just say to you hardship always creates a barrier to hearing the Word of God. What I said was hardship can create a barrier to hearing the Word of God, but it doesn't have to. It all depends on how you respond to hardship, right?

Because you know what? Hardship can also produce an openness to the Word of God if you respond properly. And the proper way to respond to hardship is with humility, to humble yourself before God, and to say, I trust You. This doesn't feel good, this is painful, but I trust You. Right?

And then, now, your heart is open. Your heart is open to learn from that hardship, and for that hardship to actually make you more receptive to the Word of God.

But it is also, as I said, very possible for hardship to cause you to stiffen your neck as the Bible would say or harden your heart, and just get mad at God and

get bitter. And if you're witnessing to somebody, and you're telling them the good news, and they respond to you by saying oh, yeah, what has God ever done for me? You know what you're dealing with. You're dealing with somebody who's gone through hardship.

And instead of softening their heart and humbling themselves under the hand of God, they stiffened their neck and said, that's enough of you. I don't want you in my life at all. I reject you. And that's sometimes what happens. You got to know that.

Verse 10. *“So the LORD said to Moses, ¹¹ “Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land.”* Notice the Lord doesn't hold back at all. He says, hey, get back in there, Moses, do it again. Go back again.

Look at verse 12. *“But Moses said to the LORD, “Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me. How then shall Pharaoh listen to me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?””*

We talked about what that means. But this is a really incredible response because this is after the Lord not only told Moses what he was to tell the other people, but Moses presumably went and spoke it to the people about all the promises God had made, saying, I'm going to do this, and this will be a work of my hands.

But you'll notice what is Moses still fixated on? He's still fixated on himself. He's still talking to God about his own limitations. But I'm a man of uncircumcised lips. I can't be... And it's all about him, it's still all about him. You see the problem?

And this is again what we struggle with many times in our walk with the Lord. God comes along and He says, here's what I'm going to do. And we go, yeah, but I, and me, and mine, and I. It's all about me, and that's why some people doubt their very salvation.

God comes along in His word and He says, listen, here's the promise. I gave my Son to die on the cross to forgive your sins, and if you'll just put your faith in Him, your slate will be wiped clean and I will forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

And people go, yeah, but I..., and I wouldn't mind if... You don't know God, what I've done, and it's..., and they pull it right back onto themselves. And God didn't say anything about how, this or that, or the other thing about what they'd

done or hadn't done. He just said, here's what My Son did. Now, are you going to trust Him? Yeah, but, yeah, but...

And whenever people come to me and they doubt their salvation, it's always a doubt that is based or predicated upon their own lives. It's not..., they're not doubting God necessarily. They're doubting themselves. They're doubting that maybe God can forgive what they did. Yeah. But good pastor, you don't know what I did. You don't know what I did. Yeah, I know, I don't know what you did, but I know what He did, and He suffered. And He suffered terribly with your sin on the cross, and it was enough. What He did was enough.

And if there's anybody here whoever doubts your salvation, if you go through periods of doubt, I want you just to know something. You need to get over yourself. You need to stop thinking about yourself, and you need to put your mind on what Jesus did on the cross and fixate on Him. That is the solution.

I'm telling you, that's the solution to doubt about salvation. But the enemy, of course, is going to be trying very, very hard to get you to think about yourself, especially when you make mistakes. Now look what you did, boy, you bummed up this time. I think you just went over the point of no return.

And that's what the enemy wants to do. He wants you to think that you're reprobate. In other words, beyond hope, as it relates to salvation and you're not, but that's what he's going to try to get you to believe. But guess what he uses to get you to believe that? He uses your own self focus against you because we're all born with a self-focus.

I'm focused on myself just as much as you're focused on yourself and it's a curse. I'm telling you, self-focus is a curse. And the enemy will exploit it at every turn, at every turn, and the only answer is to die to self. And that's a work of the Spirit that we invite in our lives. But that's the answer. You have to die to self.

Lord, I offer myself up as a living sacrifice. I put myself up on the altar because I need to die. This self, this old flesh, this self-directed all about me thinking process that I'm just wallowing in. I need to get..., I need to be rid of it. I need to just, I confess it. I ask you to forgive me and ask you to help me think about you to set my mind on things above, not on things below.

And I know that's so much easier said than done. And God knows that's so much easier said than done, so don't sit there and feel condemned. He knows, God knows, He knows how tough it is. And He knows that you can't do it on

your own. Bottom line, you can't. You can't, you can't get over yourself on your own.

It takes His power, His strength, His grace within you, and you have to just cry out. And sometimes you have to get so sick and tired of yourself that you cry out. Have you ever been there? Have you ever been so sick of who you are and what your potential is to mess up and to do stupid things, that you just cry out to God and you just say, God, I just can't stand it anymore. I hate what I've become. I hate what I see when I look in the mirror. And that's not self-loathing from the standpoint of, I'm going to do something stupid, like take my own life. It's simply recognizing in me the fact that there is a heart that is deceitfully wicked and beyond cure and that I can't do anything to solve it.

My hope you see that He can, and that's where hope lives and ought to live in all of us. Jesus, you are working in me a work of grace to change me from who I am to who you want me to be, and I want to yield to that more and more every day. I want to yield to that work, because I believe that it's a good work you're doing.

Verse 13. *“But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge about the people of Israel and about Pharaoh king of Egypt: to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.”*

All right, now, the latter part of chapter 6 here, from verse 14, pretty much to the end of the chapter, is going to just stop to establish the genealogy of Moses and Aaron. And the primary reason is to do just that, but I should say this.

The reason that they're stopping to establish the genealogy of Moses and Aaron is just because of the prominent position that they're taking here in the nation of Israel to go before Pharaoh and to intercede for the nation of Israel that they might be released.

Now, what you're going to find interesting about verses 14 and 15 is that the passage begins by talking about the clans of Reuben and Simeon. But the only reason that the author is going to cite Reuben and Simeon, who are the first 2 born sons to Jacob, is that so they can get to Levi, who is the third born son of whom Moses and Aaron came from.

Instead of just saying Moses and Aaron are from the Levitical tribe and here's their genealogy. They had to start with Reuben and Simeon because you got to do things in order. I mean, a little bit anal here, right? But this is what's going on and I just want to explain why this is happening.

Verse 14 and 15, it says, *“These are the heads of their fathers' houses: the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: (and then it names some of these heads of the houses) Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the clans of Reuben. ¹⁵ The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the clans of Simeon.”*

And then it gets, in verse 16, to the sons of Levi. *“These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: (and this is the whole purpose of giving it, because Moses and Aaron are in this lineage) Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, the years of the life of Levi being 137 years. ¹⁷ The sons of Gershon: (it names them there) Libni and Shimei, by their clans.*

¹⁸ The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, the years of the life of Kohath being 133 years. ¹⁹ The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. (I bet they were twins) These are the clans of the Levites according to their generations.” I don't know that, I'm just guessing because it's kind of weird.

Anyway, verse 20, *“Amram took as his wife Jochebed his father's sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses, the years of the life of Amram being 137 years. ²¹ The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. ²² The sons of Uzziel: Mishaël, Elzaphan, and Sithri. ²³ Aaron took as his wife Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ²⁴ The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph; (that's a weird one) these are the clans of the Korahites. ²⁵ Eleazar, Aaron's son, took as his wife one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their clans.”*

And again, that's the whole reason they did this because they're coming to this point. Verse 26, *“These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said: “Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts.” ²⁷ It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron.”* Have you got the point?

“²⁸ On the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹ the Lord said to Moses, “I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you.” ³⁰ But Moses said to the LORD, “Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?” And of course that just brings us up to where we are.

Chapter 7. *“And the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. ² You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the*

people of Israel go out of his land. ³ But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, ⁴ Pharaoh will not listen to you.” Stop there for a minute, please. Let me have your attention.

And the reason I'm asking you to pause, is because we've read something here in verse 3 that a lot of Christians find very challenging. And it's where the Lord says to Moses, *“But I will harden Pharaoh's heart.”*

And this is a common question that I get, and that is whether or not God allowed Pharaoh to exercise his free will or not, related to the decision of whether or not to let the people go. If in fact God hardened Pharaoh's heart, was he not made to only have one option? Right? And we do see in the passage, I mean, it says it pretty clearly there, doesn't it. That God did harden Pharaoh's heart, I mean, He admitted it. A lot of people wonder if God was just in bringing Pharaoh to that place where he seemed to have no choice in the matter. And it really causes some struggle in people's hearts.

Okay. There are a lot of things in the Bible that are challenging to understand. I'll just tell you that right now. But there are a lot of things in the Bible that are easy to understand from the standpoint that they're just declared to us. It's just out in the open.

And one of the things that is declared to you and me in the Bible, is that God is a God of justice. That is just flat out said. Let me show you where. Deuteronomy, up on the screen, chapter 32.

Deuteronomy 32:3-4 (ESV)

For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.”

For I will proclaim the name of (YAHWEH) the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! “The Rock, his work is perfect, (that means without flaw) for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just (and that means fair) and upright is he.”

Here's the point of what I'm getting at. The passage here in Exodus brings up the natural question in people's mind. Is God just? And then you go to Deuteronomy as you keep reading through the Bible, and you read a passage like the one that we just put up on the screen, and it says in no uncertain terms that God is not only just, but all His ways are flawless. And that means there's

no issue that we, that you or I need to be concerned about as it relates to being unjust. There's no issue.

Here's the question. Here's the question, people. Are you going to believe what the Bible says, even when you run into a passage that makes you cock your head a little bit? You see, that's the point. This is what Christians have to deal with. This is called grappling with your faith. Okay.

This is my fourth time teaching through the Bible. I'm aware of the passages that are hard to understand. There's a lot of them, and I don't claim to have a perfect handle on all of them. I can't answer all of the things that God does, and I certainly can't explain who God is from a standpoint of His nature.

But there are things that are crystal clear in the Bible, and as a believer, I have a choice to either believe it or judge those statements to be wrong based on my human intellect. Which by the way, elevates my human intellect over God's Word.

Now, there's a lot of people who aren't afraid to say that; I'm smarter than the Bible. And they would say it without batting an eye and I would take a step back, just in case a lightning bolt from heaven might course their direction. Just kidding. But, personally, I think that's human arrogance.

God's Word says to you and me that God is just and that He is..., all His ways are perfect. Now, does that mean you're going to understand His ways? What does God say about His ways? For my ways are not your ways, says the Lord, right? This is in Isaiah. He says, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

God told you ahead of time that you're not going to be able to understand all His ways. You're not going to be able to understand, right? And yet, what do we say? Well, I don't get it. I don't get it, and because I don't get it, I reject it. And what you've just done is you've taken your intellect and you've elevated it above God's ways.

You've said, this is my intellect right here, here's God's ways. Right? Yeah, that's what you've done. God told you ahead of time, you're not going to get it. You're not going to understand all the things that I do.

But let's get back to Pharaoh for just a moment. Did he ever have a choice? Well, first of all, did God harden his heart? Yeah. God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Did Pharaoh have a choice? Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh, yeah.

This is one of those situations where someone has been given over to a condition of the heart that they had followed for a long, long time, and I don't have time to get into it here this evening. But the apostle Paul..., if you want to study this out yourself, just make a note to yourself to study through Romans, chapter 1. All right.

Because the apostle Paul gives time and attention to this issue of what it means to be given over to something. And that means when someone is given to a particular act, or attitude, or whatever, and they refuse to repent over a protracted period of time. They are ultimately given over to that thing, and it's a very fearful thing, when someone is given over.

And again, Paul talks about it, he references it. And that's what's going on in Pharaoh. He has lived a life of arrogance and hardness of heart, and now it's just, it's too late. He's being given over. He's literally been given over to what he wanted in the first place. And that's the point.

God has given us the most wonderful gift, and that gift is the gift of free will. And I believe personally, that's what it means to be made in the image of God. People ask me that. What does it mean? We're made in the image of God. It means He gave you free will. He gave you something that He Himself possesses.

And do you know that human beings are the only ones that have it? Well, I mean, angels do too, but He gave you that free will, that freedom to choose. Do you think He's going to take that away from you?

Had a guy write me just today. He said, why faith? Why does God make our salvation contingent on faith? Why can't we just say Jesus died for everybody and everybody's saved?

I said, because in that case, God would violate free will. He's not going to do that. He calls you to believe, which is an act of the will, to believe, you see. That is something that it pleased God very much to give you, and He's not going to take it away.

Here's the point. You say to God over and over and over again, I don't want You. And He'll give you exactly what you said you want, and it's the only explanation. We know that the Bible says God is not willing that any should be lost. God doesn't want anybody to be lost. Here's the question. Are some lost? Yeah. Yeah, they are. Jesus said the way to destruction is broad and wide, many choose that way, so people are lost.

Why, if God wills all people to be saved, are some people lost? Because they choose to be lost. You think God goes around just picking people go, okay, you're lost, you're in, you're not, you're out. Is there some random thing going on where God just makes these arbitrary decisions? No.

He's given you incredible freedom, but He's also given you the rational understanding to be able to look at His Word, and see what it says, and to respond to it accordingly, and to respond with faith. He's given you that ability. He's given you everything you need to make the right decision. Why do some people make the wrong decision? Because they want to, they choose to.

Here's Pharaoh, he's just chosen this path over and over and over again. And so now God comes into the scene and He says, well, that's what he chose and now he's being given over to it.

Let me just make one more point. I hear a lot from very tenderhearted Christians who believe that they have been given over to some area of sin in their lives. And the reason they believe it is because they have not yet mastered that area of sin. In other words, they've not gained complete victory yet over a particular area of weakness in their life. And so their natural conclusion is, I've been given over to it.

And can I just tell you, first of all, not only is that not true in your life as a believer, that's not possible for a believer, okay? But I have to tell you this, for a believer to think that way is a very dangerous way of thinking. And the reason is, is, because the enemy is going to be all over that.

And, his goal is to bring you to the place of the opposite of faith, to devastate your life. And he will do that by getting you to believe not God, but the lie that, that you are reprobate and that there's no way you can be saved. If you're a person who's sitting there right now and you're saying, I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins and I've accepted what He did on the cross for me, there's no way you're going to be given over.

You're going to be disciplined like a child, like a son and daughter, but you're not going to be given over. That's only going to happen when somebody has reached the final point. And I don't even know where that final point is. I can't even say I've ever met anybody that's been there. I want to encourage those of you that might have a very tender heart before the Lord,

We're in the middle of verse 4 or I just started verse 4, so let's pick it up here. It says, *"Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the*

children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. ⁵ The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.” ⁶ Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. ⁷ Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.”

You might say, why is that being mentioned? Well, one of the things the Bible will often do is cite someone's age when something big is about to happen, and that's going on here.

“⁸ Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹ “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Prove yourselves by working a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’” ¹⁰ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹ Then Pharaoh (check this out) summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. ¹² For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents.”

Can you stop there for just a moment? Do you see what's going on? This is a whole lot, these secret arts that we're reading about here. There's a whole lot more going on here than just sleight of hand. These are not magicians, though, like they go around saying, pick a card, any card, these are sorcerers.

These are people who are involved in satanic elements of supernatural phenomena, and they are doing what they do, in keeping with the power of the enemy. This is something Paul spoke of. Check this out on the screen from 2 Thessalonians. Did I put that in there? Did I forget that one? I beg your pardon. Let me read it to you. You ready? You might write this down.

2 Thessalonians 2:9, *“The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the works of Satan, displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders.”* That's out of the NIV that I quoted it right there. The ESV instead of, “counterfeit,” says, “false signs and wonders.” They're still signs and wonders, but they're false from the standpoint that they're counterfeit. They are works of the enemy.

Can the enemy do miraculous things? Oh yeah. Oh, yeah, but they're counterfeit and during the Great Tribulation, he's going to do them a lot. I mean, even to making statues speak. Anyway. You can see that's what these wise men and sorcerers are demonstrating.

We're still in verse 12, *"But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. (that would have been weird to see, huh?)* ¹³ *Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said."*

This is where we start to begin the plagues, and we'll just start with the first one here tonight. ¹⁴ *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go."* ¹⁵ *Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent.*

¹⁶ *And you shall say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness." But so far, you have not obeyed.'* ¹⁷ *Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood."* ¹⁸ *The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.'"*

¹⁹ *And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'"*

²⁰ *Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood.* ²¹ *And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.*

²² *But the magicians of Egypt (look at this) did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.* ²³ *Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart.* ²⁴ *And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.*

²⁵ *Seven full days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile."* And that's where we're going to stop for tonight.

Here's the last point I want to make to you before we close in prayer. And that it's been noted by Bible students that all of the plagues that we're going to read about here in the coming chapters in Exodus are going to address or confront,

we should say, one or more of the Egyptian gods. Because remember, the Egyptians are pagans, and that means they've got gods for everything. Sun, moon, stars, water, fertility, ground, you name it, they've got a god for it.

Whenever God; the Lord God, showed His authority over a particular area, it addressed one of those gods, right? In some way, shape or form.

There's a document that I have made available that shows all the 10 plagues, the passages where they're found, and the gods that are being confronted by those plagues. And you can find it on our website at ccontario.com/exodus. That's where you'll find a button for a link for that if you want to grab that.

One last thing. I said one last thing before, I lied, this is the last, last thing. If I was Pharaoh and somebody turned my water source to blood, I think what I would have been looking for my guys to do is to turn it back into water. Now that would have been a miracle. Fact is, they couldn't do that.

God still showed His authority.

Anyway, let's pray.

Father, we thank you for Your Word and the power of it. The ability that Your Word has to challenge our lives in all of the ways that we need to be challenged.

And Father, I don't know if there's anybody here who's going through a crisis of faith tonight, but if they are, I pray that You would be with them to humble their heart before the hand of the Lord. And to say to You, I submit to You, I submit it all to You. And I lay these challenges and these painful things at your feet that I might grow in my own perseverance and maturity and that I might live for You with all of my heart.

And I thank You, Lord, for allowing the challenges to come our way because you are perfecting us and forming us into the image of Your son, Jesus Christ.

It is in His name that we pray and all God's people said, amen.

God bless you.

Have a good rest of your evening.