

Title: The Hardening of Pharaoh's heart
Text: Exodus 4-14
Theme: The hardening of Pharaoh's heart
Series: Exodus #13
Prop Stmtt God raised up Pharaoh for God's glory.

One of the great benefits of children being in the entire worship service is for them to watch dad sit under the authority of the Word. Dads, the greatest gift you can give your children is a dad who is moved and impacted by the Word of God. I don't mean just moved emotionally, but moved to the point of his life looks like, sounds like, and tastes like Jesus. What a gift to have a dad who desires for the truth of God to weigh heavy upon his life. Years ago, some meeting places for churches had pews that were grouped together for families. One pew faced the pulpit while another pew would face the other way. The parents would face the pulpit, while the children would face the parents. As the dad would listen to the sermon, he would explain it to his children. Dads were active listeners and active teachers in church. They felt the weight of God's truth upon their hearts and wanted to make certain their children understood what was being said. Last Sunday, one of our dads was sitting with his children. This dad has listened to me preach for years, and he knew how I typically introduce a sermon. He knew it so well in fact, that he anticipated what I was going to do next. He leaned over to his kids and whispered, "ok, now get ready, because here is where he is going to explain what he just said." And sure enough, that was what I did. A little later, one of his kids asked, "What does defect mean?" Dad answered well. Later on, another question was asked.

That dialogue was rehearsed to me by a person who sat near this family and rejoiced to know that these children had a dad who was actively listening and cutting up the meat into smaller pieces for his children to eat. Fathers of Cornerstone, I commend those of you who eagerly desire for the Word to minister to your children. May you be encouraged.

Read Text: Exodus 4.21; 7.3-5; 10.1-2; 14.4; 14.17-18

In his wonderful book, *God in the Wasteland*, David Wells wrote of what he called, "The Weightlessness of God."

It is one of the defining marks of Our Time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather he has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost his saliency for human life. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may nonetheless consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, his judgment no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and his truth less compelling than the advertisers sweet fog of flatter and lies. That is weightlessness.¹

¹ David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 88.

A person or a concept that carries no weight is irrelevant, meaningless, and unimportant. There is a general weightlessness of God in western Christianity. We have treated Him like a girlfriend, a therapist, an advisor, a genie and good luck charm. His Word carries so little authority. If we get around to it, if we have time, if we can fit Him into our lives is our general view. Therefore, the issue that our study of Exodus sets before us, while challenging enough, is even more difficult to digest. This is a tough issue to wrestle with, but it is in the text, so wrestle with it, we must. While God may appear to many to be weightless, He is infinite in the weight of His significance and His truth must rest heavy upon us.

There is more to this world than the information you have gathered through your limited experiences and sight, so too there is more than just this world. This world does not exist by itself. Our earth is part of a solar system that revolves around just one medium grade star. Our sun is but one of billions. Our solar system is a speck in our galaxy and our galaxy is a blip on the screen of the universe. Do you understand the breadth, the width, the height, the depth of our universe? No. No created being does.

We live in this world. We feel the effects of high pressure systems, low pressure systems, tides and seasons. Things out there (space), all affect the tides and the seasons. But we don't see that. If I am standing next to the Pacific Ocean and watching the tide go in and out, I can't see the moon pulling the waters by its gravitational forces, I just see the tides going in and out. I don't see how the spinning of the moon around our earth, and our earth's spinning around the sun, and the spinning of our solar system, or the movement of our galaxy is affecting all of these things, but that movement is going on and has implications for our natural world, but I can't see all of that.

You don't understand that anymore than you understand the breadth, the width, the height or the depth of the love of, plan of and power of God. And you don't understand or grasp the love of God because you can't really grasp the mind of God. You are a finite reflection of the infinite God. You are made in the image of God, but you are not God. The creation is only a reflection of the Creator. If we can't understand the creation, how can we put the Creator into a box and say that we have Him all figured out? We can't. Since we can't figure everything out about God, is it possible that there are some issues that due to our finiteness and limited thinking that are going to appear to be enigmas to us? Sure. But what we are commanded to do is to know as much as we can so that we can love, honor and obey Him.

GOD is GOD and we aren't.

Listen to the words of Psalm 135:5-7, "I know that the LORD is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. ***The LORD does whatever pleases him***, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses."

Matthew 5:45 “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

God is described as being in charge of the sun, which means that he is in charge of the earth’s rotation, and all of the consequences of that. He is in charge of the tides, which also implies his governing activity in the affect of the moon’s rotation of the earth. He is in charge of the weather, the rain, the wind and the lightning. Psalm 104:21-29 speaks of his control of the animal world. The beasts of the earth, the young lions and the creatures of the sea do the bidding of God. In Daniel 2 and 4 we read that it is God who sets up kings and removes kings. In Isaiah 10 it is God who uses kings and armies to accomplish his plan. In Acts 17:26 we read that it is God who determined the days for each person, the boundaries for each nation, the exact location where each person will live. 1 Sam 2:6-7 God is the one who makes the poor and who makes the rich. And in 1 Cor 4, Paul is confronting the people of the church at Corinth because so many of them were acting like arrogant snobs, 1 Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? The point of the text is, you don’t have a thing that God didn’t provide you with, so why are you acting as if you are a big deal and other people are just nobodies? Everything that you have is from God. So, you cannot say I did it all by myself. God gave you the air to breathe, the health to work and a job to work. To say, I did it all is ludicrous. From the perspective of this world it would be easy to conclude that you did it all by yourself. But from the perspective of God it is so clear that I didn’t do it all by myself, I did it because He enabled me. Did God enable you to work because He knew that you would choose to work? Did God give you air to breathe because He knew that you would choose to breathe? Did God give you strength because He knew that you would choose to use your muscles? Did God in the past, make his decisions based upon what he saw that you would do? Or, did God in eternity past make decisions because He is the LORD and therefore has the inherent right to do what pleases Him?

Ps 103:19-22; The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, O my soul.

Proverbs 19:21 “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but *it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.*”

Isaiah 46.9b-10 – “*I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.*”

One of those purposes is revealed in the opening chapters of Exodus. (4.21) We read about Pharaoh’s response to the mighty acts of judgment that God brings upon him. At times the text says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and other times it says that Pharaoh

hardened his own heart, and still other times it says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened.
(chart)

What you can see from the text is that 10 times it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. 3 times it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart and 6 times it simply states that his heart was hard. The weight of the text is definitely tilted in favor of God being the One who is most often presented as being the agent of cause. But there is more. The OT is the foundation for the NT. In Romans 9, Paul is dealing with the issue of God's sovereignty in the matter of electing certain people to salvation, and not choosing others. He uses the story of Jacob and Esau as an illustration of this. God chose to love Jacob, and God did not choose Esau, who was therefore the recipient of God's justice. The typical response to this truth is that it is not fair! (v.14) In response to that accusation, Paul quotes from Exodus and points out, that in reality, God is fair, but that our understanding of justice is all messed up. Here in Romans 9, Paul quotes God, who in Exodus 33 revealed Himself to Moses, and said this about Himself. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." God's mercy is His to give to whom He chooses to give it. The rest receive justice. Receiving justice is fair. The mercy of God is part of God's character. The love of God is part of God's character. The justice of God is part of God's character. The holiness of God is part of God's character. The glory of God, is the sum total of all of the characteristics (attributes) of God. When we pray for God to glorify Himself, we are asking God to put these characteristics of Himself on display. He said that is exactly what he did through Pharaoh. He raised up Pharaoh for the purpose of proclaiming his name throughout the earth, and did it by showing His might, power, and justice to Pharaoh and Egypt and his might, power and mercy to Israel. Why did God chose Moses over Pharaoh and Israel over Egypt? Because He is God, and that is what He determined. Through Israel God's mercy was put on display, and through Egypt God's justice was seen.

Romans 9.18, "Therefore, God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." He chose to harden Pharaoh's heart. What exactly does that mean? We are born into this world as sinners. The entire human race is born with a desire to sin and with no desire for God to rule over us. When we talk about our will, we are speaking about our decision-making process. We choose what we desire. Because we are sinners, we desire sin and so, we make choices consistent with that. On our own, we would never choose to repent and trust Christ. We don't have a desire to repent and embrace the things of God. Unless God does something, we are doomed to receive the just response of God for our sin. It is our freedom to choose that keeps us away from Christ because we choose what we desire. So, is it fair that God does not leave the ultimate decision for salvation up to us, but in eternity past made the decision of those whom He would choose. Otherwise, no one would choose God. So, no, it is not fairness (in a sense), it is GRACE!!! Fairness would be the wrath of God. This is a difficult truth for us to grasp. The fact that God chose Israel does not mean that He is being unfair to Egypt. The fact that He chose Moses and not Pharaoh is not being unfair to Pharaoh. The fact that God chooses to elect some to salvation does not mean that He is unfair to give the rest what they already desire. The problem appears to us to be, that if God gives grace to some, then why doesn't He show grace to all? That is His call.

Ultimately, it all comes down to this: Am I willing to submit myself to what God has revealed about Himself?

There is one more aspect that I want to point out before I seek to wrap this up and stick it into your heart. God hardens whom he wants to harden. And God chose to harden the heart of Pharaoh. Did God put fresh evil in Pharaoh's heart in order to accomplish that? No, it was already there. It simply means that God removed from Pharaoh's heart some of the controls that kept him from experiencing the irrational consequences of his own sin. By removing those controls, Pharaoh's unbelief went even deeper, all the while being his own. The Scripture affirms that while God is the agent ultimately responsible for the hardening, Pharaoh is still held fully accountable for his sin. Hardening does not remove culpability, it ensures it. To live with a smug complacency about sin, presuming that you can always ask forgiveness for it whenever you want is wantonly foolish, because you are assuming that you will have a sorrow over your sin, when in reality, deliberately continuing in sin brings a blindness and hardness that removes the very desire to be forgiven. Ultimately that is what I am most concerned that you grasp. God is not to be trifled with nor presumed upon. He is majestically holy, and has provided a Savior for you through Christ. While you have the desire, run to Him.

How can God hold him accountable when God had this planned out all along? Pharaoh is held responsible for his decisions. And while none of his decisions were made outside of the sovereign will of God, they were made with what appeared to him to be his own free will. (2nd anticipated response of Romans 9) (2 parts – God's part and my part)

I want you to understand all of that, because over and over you may hear, that God does not harden Pharaoh's heart until after Pharaoh first hardened his own heart. That really is not true. God told Moses before any of it began what He (God) was going to do. Sure, at times Pharaoh hardened his heart, but ultimately it was God who made the decision. However, Pharaoh is held responsible for his own decisions. So are you.

Conclusion: 4 "I knows" (revealed in the Word) 1 "mystery" (not revealed) and 1 appeal.

4 "I knows"²

1. I know, because Scripture affirms it, that God uses all things as His servants to carry out His plan and that means He even uses evil for His glory and for our good.
2. I know, because Scripture affirms it, that God is not evil, He never does evil and that He cannot be blamed for evil.
3. I know, because Scripture affirms it, that God rightfully blames and judges moral creatures (man and angels) for the evil they do.

² The 4 "I knows" and 1 "mystery" are adapted from Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology, pp.327-330.

4. I know, because Scripture affirms it, that evil is real, and that we should never do evil, nor be apathetic about evil because it will always harm us and others.

1 “mystery”

And by the way, I am ok with mystery. As I said earlier, if we can't understand the creation, how can we put the Creator into a box and say that we have Him all figured out? I am a finite part of the creation. I do not expect to understand the infinite Creator.

1. I admit that I do not fully understand how God can ordain that certain people carry out evil that is used to accomplish God's plans, and yet hold them accountable and not be blamed Himself.

Revelation 13:8 says that the Lamb (referring to Christ) was slain from the creation of the world. When the world was created, was Jesus crucified? In time - no. In actuality - no. But in the mind of God, the creation of the world was tied with absolute certainty to the death of Christ for the redemption of sinners in the world. Who killed Jesus? Actually there are two answers.

The first, the obvious and immediate answer is: Wicked men killed Jesus. That is what happened in this world. And the men who did this are held accountable for their actions. In fact in Acts 2:23, Peter is preaching to some of these men who killed Jesus and he said to them, “you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

But what we have seen throughout Scripture is that nothing happens that was not planned and determined by God. And that applies to the worst sin ever committed.

Acts 2:23 says, “you with the help of wicked men put Christ to death by nailing him to the cross, but the beginning of the verse says, “This man (Christ) was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge;

So, while the first, the obvious and immediate answer to the question of who killed Jesus, is, wicked men did. The second answer, and the bigger answer, and the ultimate answer is, His Father did. God did. The Son trusted Him. Let me pick up on that question that I had you leave open. But let me ask the same question applied to the death of Christ. Did God make his decision to send Christ to the earth because he saw that wicked men were going to kill Christ, or did the wicked men kill Christ because that was already part of God's plan? Which came first, the actions of the men, or the plan of God? It was the plan of God. Yet, those whom God used to crucify His Son are still held accountable.

1 appeal

God's sovereignty clearly does not absolve us of responsibility. Therefore, if you have never trusted in Christ, run to Him – now! Trust completely in what He has done for you. And if you are a follower of Christ, humble yourself before Him with the fresh knowledge that it is only the grace of God that has saved you and that keeps you.