

Title: Seeing is not Believing
Text: Exodus 7.14-12.36
Theme: The Difference between Knowing and Believing
Series: Exodus #10
Prop Stmt. You can know and still not believe. Faith comes from a changed heart.

Read Text: Exodus 7.14-17a; 8.20-23; 9.13-16

In recent months, we have watched the price of crude oil rise to levels most of us never imagined. Here in Detroit we are particularly sensitive to these matters since that issue alone has such a fundamental influence on the entire economic basis that sustains much of how things function. We are not as secure as we used to think, and we are not used to that, are we?

For several hundred years, the Egyptian empire sat on top of the food chain. Educationally, intellectually, economically, militarily they ruled. To this day, we are awed by the engineering that designed and constructed the pyramids, whose impressive and imposing structures on the outside are outdone by the intricate construction of elaborate tunnels and hidden burial vaults on the inside. Vast treasures have been discovered that give us a hint of the amount of wealth that flowed in that empire. But in a matter of months, just months, what took several hundred years to build, collapses. What army was it? Who invaded? How could such an empire crumble? History is silent on that score. There was no immediate threat. The mighty, mighty Egyptian empire simply ceased being a world power. In a series of what God calls, “mighty acts of judgment” (6.6) the agriculture, economy, military, environment, political structure, familial relations and religious world of the Egyptians is completely decimated. The archaeological ruins from that era give us a glimpse of the power and prestige this once mighty and proud nation enjoyed. The devastation that takes place is so pervasive and so complete, that it is next to impossible for us to imagine. But, ultimately, this morning, I am not attempting to get you to grasp in practical terms what happened in history to Egypt. I am attempting to help you hear the voice of God who thunders to a world that has chosen to be deaf to His voice. Behind all of the economic, agricultural, military, political and familial issues is a theological issue. The issue is summarized by the challenge that Pharaoh made back in chapter 5? Who is Yahweh that I should obey him?

It is not really different today. We hear it all the time. “You have your gods, I have my god. I won’t tell you what to believe, so don’t you tell me what to believe. We all have our own religions, our own beliefs, let’s just all respect each other and get along. Besides, doesn’t it sound rather arrogant to think that your way is the only way?” Into this arena, God sends Moses and Aaron to demand, by the authority of God, that Pharaoh release the Israelites from slavery and be allowed to leave the land to go and worship Yahweh in the wilderness. But, Pharaoh does not recognize Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, who claims to be the only God. So, what is going to happen? Is God, really who He claims to be? Is God going to come through for the people that He has chosen? Or is God really just a soft, empathetic grandfather figure who feels bad when our feelings get hurt in this troubled world?

The showdown is taking place on the world's stage and this conflict is stoked by the dynamics involved. At once we see a battle taking place between 80 year old Moses and the Pharaoh (who is very likely the 22-year old Amenhotep II). There is also a battle between Pharaoh and God. Eventually a little conflict begins to erupt between Pharaoh and his own magicians. There is a contrast between most of the land of Egypt and the portion of the land where the Israelites live (Goshen). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, there is a war between Yahweh and the gods of Egypt. Moses reflected upon this in Numbers 33.4b, when he wrote, "the LORD brought judgment on their gods.

This morning, I want to do an overview of the ten mighty acts of judgment that God brought upon Pharaoh, the gods and the people of Egypt. This overview is for the purpose of helping you see from a larger picture of what has taken place, and frankly, what is going to take place.

The Explanation

As I have studied these plagues, I believe that the best way to see them is in three series of three, with the final and most conclusive 10th plague as the climax.

The first three plagues are what I call irritating. They are very inconvenient and very bothersome, but by themselves do not destroy the entire country. The first plague results in the water of the Nile river turning into blood which of course results in all of the fish dying and stinking and the people being unable to use it for drinking. Of course this was not only a direct confrontation with Pharaoh who was physically present to watch this take place, but it was also a direct assault upon the Egyptian god, Hapi, the god of the Nile (water), upon which they so desperately depended to overflow its banks annually in order to provide the needed water for their crops.

Again, God does not do a thing by happenstance. I remind you that 80 years earlier, for a while, the Pharaoh had ordered that all Israelite boys born be thrown into the Nile River in order to be drowned. What Egypt saw as their mighty river of life, God saw as the curse of death. The turning of the water into blood is a very graphic reminder of this. I also think that this particular plague is a harbinger of things to come since in a matter of months, another body of water will be a place of death for the Egyptians, this time for their vast and mighty army. So, how does Pharaoh respond? He is not impressed. His wise men and magicians are able to do the same thing. Of course, one has to wonder why they do not work on undoing the problem rather than making it worse, but, perhaps their government works a bit like ours. Pharaoh's lack of repentance to the Word of God and the demonstration of His power, brings about the second plague – frogs.

The goddess Hekt, occupied a prominent part in the Egyptian circle of gods. She was a goddess of childbirth. Again, the Nile river figures prominently in this plague as well. The message of this plague that God does not forget should not be forgotten. The Egyptians were worshiping and serving the creation, and despised the Creator. Be careful what you worship, for you will get it. And, oh did they get what they worshiped!

Frogs were everywhere. This is not a cute little, open your sock drawer and out jumps a frog story. This is, frogs in your food, frogs in your privacy, ruining your sanitation, frogs ruining your sleep, frogs in your hair, frogs in your clothes, frogs in your bed, frogs in your ears, frogs in your meetings, frogs are everywhere! Again, (8.7) “the magicians did the same things by their secret arts; they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.” That’s brilliant!! Now, we have even more frogs! But, something happens in the response of Pharaoh. He says something (8.8), “Pray to the LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD.” He acknowledges that the LORD exists. But, before we proclaim him converted, upon the relief of the plague, he hardens his heart, even though the olfactory senses remain assaulted for a while when they all died. Next time, Pharaoh, be a little more specific as to how you want God to dispose of them.

The third and last plague in the first series is that of gnats. This time, no warning is given. This time, the magicians come to Pharaoh and say (8.19) “this is the finger of God.” This plague is the shortest account recorded. The plague before it came from the water, this plague comes from the ground. The amount of gnats is so great; it is like the dust has all turned into gnats. While this plague does not seem at first to be all that significant, I see a couple of very important things taking place. One, dust is what we are made from, and it is to what our physical remains will return. That process of decomposing attracts gnats. The warning of this plague is clear. God will not be mocked. The second thing is that this is the last time that Aaron is really featured. From now on, the Word of the LORD comes to Moses and he is directed to speak and to act. The blood, the frogs and the gnats are problematic, but Pharaoh does not listen. “Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said.” (8.19)

The next three plagues are part of the second series. Their impact is not only more destructive but another feature factors in as well. Beginning with the 4th plague, there is a clear distinction between what is going on in the land of Egypt from what is going on in the section of land where the Israelites live (Goshen). This does not mean that the Israelites necessarily dealt with the frogs and the gnats, but it is certainly possible. The 4th plague is announced to Pharaoh at the river, in the morning (like the 1st one). Moses tells him that this miraculous sign will take place, tomorrow (8.23). Pharaoh did not change his mind and the very next day, “dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh’s palace and into the houses of his officials and throughout Egypt the land was ruined by the flies.” This time Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron to come back. He initially makes a concession to them, and asks them to pray for him. Moses warns him to not be deceitful. The flies leave, (8.32) “But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.”

The 5th plague attacks the livestock. There are many gods in the religious arsenal of Egypt that are affected by this, perhaps the most prominent being Isis and Hathor. True to the warning given, the next day, the livestock of the Egyptians died. Moses had been demanding that Pharaoh send the Israelites out of the land. He does not, but Pharaoh “sent men” to investigate what happened to the Israelites. Their livestock was fine, but he refused to change his mind. The 6th plague, like the 3rd plague came without warning.

This time, it did not come from the water, the dirt, the air or from the animal kingdom, it directly affected the people. It was a plague of boils. You cannot walk, sit, lie down, or function in any normal manner with boils. Taking soot from the kilns where the Israelites had been forced for years to make bricks is a form of justice as Moses tosses it into the air and in the presence of Pharaoh it becomes a fine dust that brings festering boils on men and animals. Here the text says (9.12) that the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron."

The final round of plagues are different. The 7th plague, like numbers 1 and 4 comes with a warning given to Pharaoh in the morning, (probably at the Nile). Here in the plague that receives the longest amount of explanation, God lets Pharaoh in on the "secret" that He has already revealed to Moses. The secret is this: All that is taking place is ultimately not about you Pharaoh, but about me – Yahweh. You are simply a means to an end. I am using your stubbornness as the occasion to let the world know that I am God and there is no other. You can continue to play hardball, but know this, I am God, that's just the way it is. Whether or not you accept that does not change the fact that I am God. Not only does my plan not depend on you, but you depend on my plan. I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. What is going on here is much bigger than Pharaoh and Egypt. God informs Pharaoh that what Egypt is about to experience is the full force of God's plagues. The 7th plague is hail, like Egypt has never seen before. This time, some of Pharaoh's officials took the warning to heart and moved some of their livestock inside. (Livestock that had replaced the ones that had previously died). People left out in the fields, died. Animals left out, died. The flax and the barley were destroyed. This time Pharaoh admitted that he had sinned, that the LORD is in the right, and that he and his people are in the wrong, and he again asks for relief with a promise that the Israelites can go. Moses knows that Pharaoh does not really believe what he is saying. But nevertheless asks the LORD to stop the hail, it stops and Pharaoh again, changes his mind. The 8th plague reveals another purpose of God's. Not only is God showing his power to Egypt, but Israel has a front row seat on what their God will do for His people. The question of, "does God really keep his Word" has been conclusively answered. Moses and Aaron again warn Pharaoh, and this time Pharaoh's officials plead with Pharaoh to give in. But, he is too entrenched now. The negotiations back and forth are not from a truly humble heart on the part of Pharaoh. In the end, there is no deal and the locusts come like nothing you have ever seen. They eat everything. Pharaoh begs for relief and acknowledges his sin, but confession without repentance only adds to one's condemnation. And then, like plagues 3 and 6 the 9th one comes without warning. Darkness! It is so dark, that you cannot see your hand in front of your face. The text says that it was a darkness that you could feel. The main god of the Egyptians, like many pagan societies was the sun-god, they called Ra.

"I am he among the gods who cannot be repulsed."

He is Re (Egyptian sun-god), when he arises on the eastern horizon of heaven."

Ra was powerless. Pharaoh was not only powerless, he was part of the problem. This time Pharaoh is more angry than anything else. His heart reveals the stupidity of sin. If I

am going down, I'm taking everyone with me. Moses is banished from his presence, an order that he himself does not enforce. His word means nothing now. From the end of chapter 5 to the end of chapter 10, the story has completely changed. Two men in their 80's, no longer invite jokes from Pharaoh's men, they are feared; they are like God. And yet, there is one more, the final plague that we will look at next week. For today, there are five inter-related truths that I want to inscribe into your hearts.

The Application

1. God will do everything that He has to do in order to keep His Word.

This truth, like the four that follow can be a great comfort, or an enormous warning, depending on which side you are on. The warning part is this.

a. God fights against those who attempt to stand against Him.

When you place your opinion and your authority above God's you are courting disaster with your life. On the other hand,

b. God fights for His own.

The people of Israel could not fight for themselves. They had no army, no weapons, no standing, no influence and no power. God fights for His own people. (By the way, I am not talking about what our foreign policy ought to be as a nation, I am simply pointing out that God takes care of His own.) Today, His own, are the true followers of Christ, some of whom are Jews, most are Gentile. His own are being called out of many nations to form one people, who will rule with the king – Jesus. I'll have more on that in a minute.

2. Disobeying the Revealed Word of God brings Disaster.

The revealed Word of God is a blessing if it is obeyed. To hear God's Word and in your spirit, shrug your shoulders and say, "whatever" or "I'll take my chances" is absurd. Look at the havoc that Pharaoh brought upon himself and his own land.

a. Personal disobedience invites blind stupidity

b. Ongoing rejection heightens the severity of the consequences

To think that you can reject God's Word for a while and then set the time for your repentance is spiritual blindness and deafness. One of the consequences of rejecting God, is that He rejects you. The fact that you have a conscience today does not mean that you will have one tomorrow. If, in your heart, or even with your words, you continue to tell God to leave you, abandon you, there will come a time when He will withdraw his voice of hope and word of mercy.

3. **Man's rejection of God brings the earth's rejection of man.**

The creation is rising up against its ruler, because its ruler has rejected its Creator. Romans 8 speaks of how this earth groans as she awaits her liberation. Sin has so fundamentally affected everything. In the plagues we see a taste of nature, in rebellion to man. Pharaoh was completely powerless. The man, whose voice demanded obedience, was reduced to begging for intervention by 2 old men. Pharaoh was no match for frogs, gnats, flies, hail and locusts. Mankind cannot stand before nature. In recent years we have heard so much about the China economy, the Chinese military, etc. A few months ago when they were celebrating the Chinese new year, severe weather created such a havoc with her electrical grid that many of the trains ground to a halt. Hundreds of thousands of people were stranded. The past two weeks again illustrate that no country can stop earthquakes. Myanmar stands powerless before cyclones. We do what we can to fight wildfires in Florida and California, but in all of these things, we are so limited. The Bible tells us that we should expect these things. When the rulers that God has raised up to rule the earth, reject Him, the earth will reject its rulers. God made the earth in order to be an arena through which He would bless man. But when we reject God's authority, the very earth, intended by God to bless us, becomes a means to judge us.

4. **There is no God like our God.**

- a. All other gods are pretend gods with no power
- b. You will show his mercy by your submission or you will show His righteous power by your obstinance.

God will receive glory from your life. If you humble yourself and trust in Him and follow Him, He will shower you with His mercy, for He loves to be known as a merciful God. But if you dig in your heels and rebel, then He will still receive glory from you, but it won't be from showing off His mercy, but showing off His justice. He is God. He is the Creator.

5. **God is preparing this world for His people.**

This hit me harder more than anything else in my study this week. I began to see the parallels between Exodus and the book of Revelation; between this world and Egypt. The seven seals of judgment that are opened involve darkness that for a time comes on the earth. The seven trumpet judgments involve a plague of hail and a portion of the sea turning to blood. But in Revelation we see something that is worse than the judgments of nature. There are people who will cry out for the mountains and the rocks to fall down upon them so they do not have to face the wrath of the Lamb. Why does all of this take place? Like Exodus, God is calling His people out in order to establish them in the kingdom for which He is preparing them and preparing this world. He does so by tearing down all competing empires. What happened to Egypt (nationally) is a preview of what is coming to this world. For Pharaoh, seeing, was not believing. It usually isn't. Believing is seeing.