

EXODUS 7:1-24

INTRODUCTION

My Mother use to tell me that there's none so deaf as those who will not hear. That actual proverb comes from the 16th Century but it is as true in our day as it was in the day it was written. But that proverb is equally true of Pharaoh who was not physically deaf but on numerous occasions he deliberately closed his ears and refused to listen to what God said to him through Moses and Aaron.

However although Pharaoh was refusing to listen to God, Moses and Aaron were listening even though Moses raised his issue concerning his speech. God once again speaks to Moses and Aaron and they listen. I want us to notice what God says.

1. GOD'S WORD TO MOSES (vs. 1-7)

These verses are in effect God's answer to Moses' objection recorded for us in 6:12 & 30. God now promises Moses that he will be like God to Pharaoh. Moses will go before Pharaoh with divine authority and like the true God he will make his word known to his prophet Aaron who will speak it to Pharaoh. So the chain will come from God to Moses to Aaron to Pharaoh. Although Moses will be like God to Pharaoh he is not of course really God, Moses and Aaron are just agents of God and therefore must obey and speak all that they are commanded to speak (v 2). But Pharaoh will not listen because God will harden his heart. Now God by his action of hardening is not making Pharaoh evil, Pharaoh is evil in and of himself. What God is doing is hardening Pharaoh in his nature by giving him completely over to sin. It is the same thing that Paul talks about in Romans 1:24-26. Pharaoh's heart is hard by nature God is just confirming him in that hardness.

God is going to be gracious to Pharaoh for he will witness many miracles and wonders in Egypt yet he will remain unrepentant and will refuse to listen (v 4). Even though Pharaoh will not listen Moses and Aaron are still to go and speak God's word to him. Moses has to learn that the rejection of God's word by Pharaoh is part of God's plan for the exodus. It is because of his refusal to listen that God sends his judgements on Egypt, which eventually result in the release of the Israelites.

Another result of Pharaoh's refusal to listen will be that the Egyptians might learn that God is the Lord (Jehovah v 5). Although God's intention in bringing the plagues upon Egypt is primarily judgmental however in another sense it is evangelistic. During the plagues for example people came to believe the words of the Lord and subsequently acted upon them (9:20).

Moses and Aaron obey God and do as they were commanded. Gone are Moses' doubts and his reluctance to carry out God's mission from this point on Moses expresses no more uncertainties he and Aaron are now completely faithful in proclaiming God's message. They were both old men (v 7) but they were God's men and they were willing to stand in the gap and speak God's word to Pharaoh.

Now there is an important application that I don't want us to miss here. There is the very simple lesson that God uses people to proclaim his word, but this word is like a two edged sword. On the positive side sinners come to saving faith in Christ through the proclamation and speaking of this word. You can clearly see this in the scriptures through people like Paul, Philip and Jesus himself. In the Old Testament Jonah the reluctant prophet is another example of what God does with his word when it is proclaimed to sinners.

However on the negative side sometimes we are called to preach God's word to those who will not repent. I think of Prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah in particular (Isaiah 6:8-10). Isaiah proclaimed God's word to people knowing that they would not turn to God. We can see this two edged sword

in the parables of Jesus (Matthew 13:10-17). God's word to sinners is one of grace to some and judgment to others. As a result of God's word proclaimed some unbelievers harden their hearts and are judged accordingly while others believe and are freed from their slavery to sin. Our Christian lives are either hardening people's hearts or are causing people to believe but one thing we can be sure of our lives are having an effect on people.

Although we see it when people believe we do not see the hardening process going on in people's hearts but we must simply believe that God is at work by his Spirit through the proclaiming of his word and is accomplishing his purposes in the lives of those who hear that word (Isaiah 55:11). There was once a missionary to Tunisia who laboured for 14 years without seeing a single convert to Christ. Nevertheless he took every opportunity going to continue to proclaim God's word. The missionary explained to a visiting Christian that he was called to preach the gospel with no guarantee of people coming to Christ. Although in the New Testament we are to pray and expect fruit from the proclaiming of God's word nevertheless we are not guaranteed that in every situation God will save sinners.

It might be that God's has sent his word into some situations to have a hardening effect upon the people and I do wonder if that is God's purpose at this moment for our own nation. Whatever God's purpose is our responsibility is to obey God and proclaim his word in our situation.

2. GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS POWER BEFORE PHARAOH (vs. 8-13)

God tells Moses and Aaron that Pharaoh will expect them to perform a miracle to prove how powerful their God is. This issue of proving one's power shows us what is really going on in this episode. The contest here is not one between Moses and Pharaoh or even between Moses and Pharaoh's magicians or even between Israel and Egypt. The contest is between God and the gods of the Egyptians. The question is who is the one true and powerful God?

Who is sovereign and in control? The next number of chapters will answer those questions for us. Moses is obedient to God and his staff becomes a snake. But Pharaoh called his wise men and sorcerers and magicians and they were able to do the same thing that God did. But Aaron's rod swallowed the rods of the wise men to show that God is all-powerful that he and he alone is sovereign. But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he still did not listen to Moses.

Now if you are thinking today you will ask how could these magicians turn a rod into a snake? We know that Aaron's action was carried out by the power of God but what about these Egyptians. Some commentaries think this was done by sleight of hand and was therefore a trick. However the text tells us that the Egyptians did the same things by their secret arts. It seems that their rods really did become snakes and I want to suggest to you that the power at work here is the power of the Evil One himself. So the contest here is one between God and Satan.

Now again let us learn the lessons of these verses. First of all let us ever remember that we have an enemy Satan who is powerful and will use his power to oppose God and God's people. Although he is a defeated foe because of Jesus Christ and his work on the cross for sinners we must always be on our guard and never treat his power lightly. He is out to counterfeit God's power and deceive people through displays of his power.

We have an enemy of our souls who is powerful, he blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4) and roams around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Therefore we must be on our guard but we must also remember that although Satan is powerful more powerful than us, he is not all-powerful and our God who is sovereign is almighty and limits the attacks of Satan according to his sovereign purposes for his people.

However there is another application that I want to bring to your attention here. In many ways Pharaoh is typical of unbelievers generally. He asks God for proof of his power. When God shows him that proof through the Scriptures the unbeliever still will not believe. Unbelievers simply will not be persuaded no matter how much evidence is presented (creation issue). Many of those who witnessed Jesus power in his various miracles refused to believe that he is the Christ. People cannot be persuaded to accept Jesus as Saviour we cannot just reason with people and present our arguments and expect that people will believe.

Of course we should seek to present our evidence for the existence of our God and of course we ought to seek to convince people of the truth but those things alone are not sufficient. What we need is to have people's hearts changed by the will and power of almighty God. There is no other way, therefore we ought to spend at least as much time praying for God to open people's hearts as we do trying to convince people of the truth.

All the time we must remember that behind every person we meet and talk to; there is Satan at work seeking to keep that person in his grip and sway.

3. GOD'S JUDGMENT BEGINS (vs. 14-25)

Because of Pharaoh's unyielding heart in refusing to let God's people go Moses is to go to Pharaoh again and ask for the release of the Israelites. He is to do this first thing in the morning as Pharaoh was on his way to the river Nile. Moses is to make sure that he takes with him the staff and both he and Aaron are to be very brave as they confront Pharaoh with the solemn truth that until now you have not listened (v 16). Moses and Aaron obey the Lord and they tell Pharaoh exactly what is going to happen (vs. 18-19) and by this people will know that the God of the Israelites is the LORD (Jehovah).

Again Moses and Aaron obey the Lord they struck the Nile with their staff and what God had promised happened. The fish in the Nile died and the river smelt and the Egyptians could not drink from it (vs. 20-21). Now the striking of the Nile has more significance than we might think. The Egyptians worshipped the gods of the Nile, they regarded the Nile as their life-giving god because it provided them with water to drink and wash in. It irrigated their lands, enabling their crop to grow.

Often the Egyptians offered their sacrifices to the gods of the Nile, so this plague is an attack on the Egyptian's gods; God is saying I alone am the only God I am in control and sovereign in this universe. Pharaoh ought to have humbled himself there and then and submitted to the one true God but Pharaoh's heart was so hard that he called for his own magicians and they did the same thing. They could not reverse the situation they could not remove the blood from the Nile instead they made their own judgement worse by doing the same thing again by the power of Satan.

Now some see a problem here. If the Lord had turned all the waters into blood which is what v 19 seems to suggest then where did the magicians find clean water to turn it into blood. I think the answer lies in v 24. When the Egyptians realised that they could not use the water from the Nile, they then started digging alongside it to see if they could find uncontaminated water.

As soon as some fresh water started to seep through, the Egyptian magicians turned it into blood! The result of all this is that Pharaoh's heart became hard, he would not listen he went back to his palace and did not even take this plague to heart (vs. 22-23). Pharaoh had no intention to yielding to God or to anyone else.

Let this be a solemn warning to us. This event teaches us that God hates idolatry and idolatry is anything that replaces God in our lives. The Egyptians worshipped the gods of the Nile; it is likely that when Pharaoh was going to the Nile he was going to worship or sacrifice to one of the gods of the Nile. By turning it into blood God is showing us the powerlessness of idols and he is

demonstrating his supreme power over this universe. We may well have little idols in our own hearts, idols that control our thinking, planning and actions but if that is the case we then need to be careful for God will not put up with other gods in our lives and he may well bring his discipline upon our lives to show us the foolishness and powerlessness of our idols.

There may be times when God so works in our lives that he brings us really low so that we will submit to him and admit that God is Jehovah, the eternal and all-powerful God of this universe. So repent and give up our idols and turn to God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This incident is also a warning to those of us who might harden our hearts against the Lord. Perhaps you come to church every week and hear about the Lord Jesus and the need to be saved. But you have hardened your heart against God you are so proud that you will not submit to his authority and Lordship.

Then we need to beware! Remaining in such a state invites God's judgement upon us. This is what Revelation chapter's 15-16 say and 16:3-4 is taking the image that we find in Exodus and says that because God is angry with sinners who refuse to repent then he acts throughout history in various temporary judgements that foreshadow the final judgement of God.

This is a solemn word to those of you who do not know Christ. God is not indifferent about this matter, your unrepentant heart is inviting God's wrath upon you. God is angry with you because of your sin and God's patience with you does not last forever, that is why you must repent before God, admit your sin trust in Jesus Christ as the one who can save you from sin and experience the freedom from the grip of sin that conversion brings into your life.

I plead with you trust Christ and find pardon for your sins. Do not harden your heart otherwise you will face the wrath and judgement of God. Ultimately God's wrath against sin and his judgement will place you in hell. That is why this is serious. Repent before it is too late.

Amen