

April 30th, 2023

The Sixth Plague: Egypt Becomes a Furnace

Exodus 9:8-12

No escape

Thus far we have seen five plagues unleashed on Egypt because Pharaoh would not let God's people go. Now we arrive at the six plague. And there is a vital lesson to be learned here: *mankind may indeed rebel against God's law, but they cannot escape God's judgment. Humanity may reject the Lord as their lawgiver, but they cannot refuse Him as their judge.*¹

- Our first parents rebelled against the Lord's command in the garden, *but they could not escape His judgment* and they were cast out of Eden (Gen. 2:24).
- In the antediluvian world man rebelled against God's commands, *but they could not escape His judgment* and were swallowed up in the flood (Gen. 7:22-23).
- The people of Babel rebelled against God's cultural mandate, *but they could not escape His judgment*—their language was confused and they were dispersed over the whole face of the earth (Gen. 11:7).

The God of the 21st Century

Pharaoh has rebelled against God's commands again and again *but* he cannot escape God's judgment. Dear congregation, this is the God who rules

¹ "Men may refuse subjection to God as a lawgiver; they may shake the yoke of his laws by rebellion; yet they cannot withdraw themselves from his judgment. Although they will not have God for their lawgiver, yet they shall have him for their judge." Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 191

and reigns in the 21st century. Our God is not *merely* “the Possessor of all power in Heaven and Earth”² but He is the Supreme Judge who presides over every soul and every nation. Every attempt in history to escape His judgment has failed. Our God is not a puny god.

Judgment is for redemption

Nor is our God a cold, distant God. *Why* is He judging Egypt? Because He swore by an invincible covenant promise “I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you” (Genesis 12:3). Judgment fell on Egypt because she cursed Yahweh’s people. The LORD cursed the dragon for His people’s sake. Do you think anything has changed today? “I the LORD do not change” (Malachi 3:6). The same God who judged Egypt in order to redeem His people is the same God who is judging the world today. Do not let your hearts be troubled by what you see. What God is *about to do* in our world today, we do not know. But what we do know is that He has made a distinction between those who live in Goshen—*those who are in Christ*—and those who live in Egypt. We need not fear though the earth gives way and the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. The wicked will not escape judgment. But God’s people already have escaped it through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

★ The Burning

★ The Defiling

★ The Hardening

² A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Books, 1984), pg. 19

I. The Burning

Heavy symbology

Please look at v.8 “And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,³ “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh.” Moses and Aaron were to take soot or ashes from this kiln or furnace. Perhaps it was a furnace that Israel cooked bricks in.⁴ There is heavy symbology happening here. After Israel’s exodus, Moses and the prophets described Israel’s stay in Egypt as their time in the furnace.

- Deuteronomy 4:20 “But the LORD has taken you and brought you *out of the iron furnace*, out of Egypt.”
- 1 Kings 8:51 “they are your people, and your heritage, which you brought out of Egypt, *from the midst of the iron furnace*.”
- Jeremiah 11:4 “I brought them out of the land of Egypt, *from the iron furnace*.”

Egypt was an iron furnace, a place of great affliction for Israel.

³ Judgment without warning

Remember that the plagues are in cycles of 3. The 10th plague being set apart by itself. In the first two plagues of each series, God issues a threat and gives Pharaoh time to repent. But in the third plague of each series there is no warning, just an immediate judgment. God is a long-suffering and patient God, and he warns the sinner again and again, but there comes a time when judgment comes without warning.

⁴ “The definite article implies that some particular “furnace” is meant, and that Pharaoh was near it, suggests it was no mere heating apparatus. The Companion Bible says of this furnace: “i.e., one of the altars on which human sacrifices were sometimes offered to propitiate their god Typhon (the evil Principle). These were doubtless being offered to avert the plagues, and Moses, using the ashes in the same way produced another plague instead of averting it.” A.W. Pink, *Gleanings In Exodus*, pg.113. Alternatively “Furnaces in Egypt were either for the melting of metal, the preparing of lime, or the baking of bricks. It was probably from a furnace of this last kind that the ashes were now taken. Much of Goshen had been converted into a brick-field (Exodus 1:14; Exodus 5:7-13); and though most of the bricks made would be simply dried in the sun, a portion would be subjected to artificial heat in brick-kilns. When ashes from one of these kilns were made the germs of a disease that was a sore infliction, their own wrongdoing became to the Egyptians a whip wherewith God scourged them.” Ellicott’s Commentary at <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/9-8.htm>

Poetic justice

This plague is poetic justice. Pharaoh enslaved Israel to bake bricks in a furnace—now that furnace becomes a weapon against Pharaoh. Pharaoh severely afflicted Israel described as putting them in a furnace—now he and the Egyptians are put in the furnace as it were.⁵ *Ashes* were thrown over Egypt symbolizing that she was being burned up.

- This imagery is used elsewhere when God sentenced the king of Tyre. Ezekiel 28:18 “By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries; *so I brought fire out from your midst; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth* in the sight of all who saw you.”
- And again in the latter days,⁶ Malachi 4:3 “And you shall tread down the wicked, *for they will be ashes* under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.”

⁵ The public nature of judgment

Notice the end of v.8 says that Moses and Aaron were to throw the ashes up *in the sight of Pharaoh*. In other words, this terrible judgment was to be *public*. Why is the judgment public?

1) Because this world was designed for one main purpose: to bring glory to God. One of the repeated refrains we find in Exodus is "so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God."

Exodus 8:10

2) Because the rebellion against God and His people has been public. Egypt's crimes against Israel were public. So Egypt is being punished publicly. Since the Fall the seed of the serpent has openly, publicly harassed, persecuted, tortured and murdered God's people publicly. Their judgment will be public, in the sight of all so that "the righteous cause may be pleaded and vindicated, and wickedness, which has been approved, honored, and rewarded, may receive it's due disgrace and punishment." (cf. Edwards, pg. 192-193) See Revelation 20:11-15

LCQ. 89. *What shall be done to the wicked at the day of judgment?* A. At the day of judgment, the wicked shall be set on Christ's left hand, and, upon clear evidence, and full conviction of their own consciences, shall have the fearful but just sentence of condemnation pronounced against them; and thereupon shall be cast out from the favorable presence of God, and the glorious fellowship with Christ, his saints, and all his holy angels, into hell, to be punished with unspeakable torments, both of body and soul, with the devil and his angels forever.

⁶ It seems to me from the context that this Day of the Lord is not speaking about the final judgment but rather the terrible judgment that is coming on Jerusalem in 70 AD. Elsewhere, God's pouring out His wrath on Israel is compared to putting them into the furnace Ezekiel 22:17-22

Dust and ashes

v.9 “It shall become fine *dust* over all the land of Egypt...” Stop. Now we have the combination of *dust and ashes*. Egypt became dust and ashes. She was being de-created. God made man out of dust and now Egypt was returning to dust (Genesis 3:19). This was clearly a work of Yahweh. Moses and Aaron at best had four handfuls of ash, and v.9 says it covered *all the land of Egypt*.

Boiling skin

Continuing halfway through v.9 “...and [it shall] become *boils breaking out in sores* on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt. [v.10] So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. And Moses threw it in the air, and it became *boils breaking out in sores* on man and beast.”⁷ The symbology intensifies. Egypt is being thrown into the furnace, and the skin of the Egyptians is 'bubbling' from the heat. In fact the root word for “boil” means to burn! One commentator said “...these ashes [became] a small dust, and falling down like the dew, snow, or sleet, *yet* hot and burning, [producing] sore boils, burning ulcers... rising up in pustules, blisters.”⁸

The worst plague thus far

This is the worst plague so far. The last plague ruined Egypt's economy for years to come. But these burning ulcers were a direct judgment against the Egyptian's own persons. Recall in the book of Job after he lost his children and property, Satan attacked his health last. Satan told the LORD in 2:4-5 “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. ⁵But stretch out your hand and

⁷ "and beast" Creation itself groans because of man's sin and is caught up in the punishment of it. Romans 8:20-21 As we have seen, man's sin ruins the land and it ruins the animals as well. The reason why the world is in the shape it is in today is because of sin.

⁸ Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible at <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/9-9.htm>

touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” Then Satan struck Job with these boils (same Hebrew word), and they covered him “from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (v.7). Deuteronomy 28:35 makes mention of these same boils that “cover from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.” Oh imagine that, these hot pus-filled ulcers and boils didn’t merely cover their whole body, but they were erupting even on the bottom their feet. One commentator says here “To have an ailment which affects even the sole of one’s foot means to be incapacitated. A boil-like ailment on the sole of one’s foot means that a man cannot walk or work.”⁹ This is verified in v.II. “And *the magicians could not stand* before Moses *because of the boils...*” Jannes and Jambres¹⁰—these demonic magicians—couldn’t even stand on their feet. The Egyptians lost their economy in the last plague which was terrible. But now their skin was burning with erupting ulcers. Egypt had become a burning furnace. Sitting was painful, wearing clothes was painful, lying down was painful. No Egyptian could work, walk, or even *stand*. You see, this plague was a foreshadow of the final judgment. Psalm 1:5 “*the wicked will not stand* in the judgment”

1st Principle: There is a more terrible furnace to come

That brings us to our **1st principle**: *Throughout history God has fore-shadowed the final judgment as a burning furnace.* Consider three examples of this.

⁹ Rousas John Rushdoony, *Commentaries on the Pentateuch: Exodus*, Vallecito, CA.: Ross House Books, 2004), pg. 104

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 3:8

1. Sodom and Gomorrah

First, when the LORD rained sulfur and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, it says “the smoke of the land went up *like the smoke of a furnace*” (Genesis 19:28). And Peter tells us it is “...an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:6).

2. Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace

Second, King Nebuchadnezzar cast Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fiery furnace, but they didn’t perish because the Son of God walked with them in the midst of the fire (Daniel 3:24-25). It was the wicked guards who carried out Nebuchadnezzar’s order that were burned up. Daniel 3:22 “Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, *the flame of the fire killed those men* who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.” Those who trust Christ are saved, but those outside of Christ are burned up.

3. The burning of the weeds

Third, Jesus speaks about the burning at the end of the age. Matthew 13:40-42 “Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴²and *throw them into the fiery furnace.*”¹¹ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”¹²

¹¹ cf. Isaiah 66:24

¹² Other examples include Korah’s rebellion (Numbers 26:10 w/ Jude 1:11); the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD (Malachi 4:1,6 w/ Matthew 22:7) and Psalm 11:6 and 21:8-9

Informatory Use

But there's a vital difference between this fiery judgment in Egypt and the fire on the Last Day. In history God's judgments are mixed with mercy. Here the Egyptians could still seek repentance, and many of them did. A great multitude of Egyptians left with Israel Exodus 12:38 tells us. Many of them became one with the people of God. They found mercy after they experienced judgment.¹³ But at the last judgment, no mercy will be found. There will be no ability for the wicked to change their circumstances. Oh think how terrible that Day will be. Does it bother you to think of it? As I was studying for this message, my heart beat faster and my spirit sank while even thinking about it. But that's just it, if it's even terrible and uncomfortable to think about, if it was terrible for Egypt to suffer this plague though there was mercy mixed in, how much more terrible will it be on that Day when all enjoyments, all comfort, all hope, all pleasure, all relief, all rest all help is burned up and turned to ash? Jonathan Edwards says here "The soul will be, as it were, utterly crushed; the wrath will be wholly intolerable. It must sink, and will utterly sink, and will have no more strength to keep itself from sinking, than a worm would have to keep itself from being crushed under the weight of a mountain."¹⁴

Hortatory Use/Admonitory Use

If you are in Christ, then take heart you have nothing to fear. You are in the land of Goshen. v.11 says that this terrible judgment came only "*upon all the Egyptians.*" Belonging to Jesus Christ means we have already escaped the wrath to come. I Thessalonians 1:10 "Jesus...delivers us from the wrath to come." John 5:24 we will "...not come into judgment, but [we have] passed from death to life."

¹³ So it appears that at least these Egyptians were healed from the boils.

¹⁴ Edwards, pg. 123

But if you are outside of Christ, then look to these Egyptians, look to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, look to the guards that were consumed in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, all these judgments are a warning from Heaven for you. Dear unbelieving friend, America is experiencing God's judgment right now, can't you see that? I don't know what God is going to do next. But I do know that when God was pouring out terrible judgments on the Egyptians, it was because He was preparing a wonderful deliverance for His people. Unless you are in Goshen, you will perish. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36) That's our **first point**: *Throughout history God has fore-shadowed the final judgment as a burning furnace.*

II. The Defiling

Another layer: *they became unclean*

There's another layer of symbology in our text. These ashes that Aaron and Moses cast over the land defiled every Egyptian.¹⁵ Their skin immediately broke out with *boils*. What kind of disease was this? The same Hebrew word for boils here is used in connection with leprosy in Leviticus 13:18-20 "If there is in the skin of one's body a *boil* and it heals,¹⁹ and in the place of the *boil* there comes a white swelling or a reddish-white spot, then it shall be shown to the priest.²⁰ And the priest shall look, and if it appears deeper than the skin and its hair has turned white, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean. *It is a case of leprosy*

¹⁵ In scripture, *ashes* is used to denote vileness, meanness, frailty, humiliation and judgment (1828). cf. Exodus 27:3; Leviticus 6:10-11; Numbers 4:13; Numbers 19:9-10; 2 Kings 23:4,6; Job 30:19; Isaiah 44:20

disease that has broken out in the boil.” The Egyptians became not only physically disgusting in this plague, but religiously unclean. This was not just a category for the ancient Jews, other religions including the Egyptians also held to a type of ceremonial cleanness. As one author says “Cleanliness [was] paramount in the Egyptian society, this plague pronounces the people “unclean.””¹⁶

Against the pantheon

However these boils not only defiled the Egyptians but they defied the Egyptian gods. Recall that Numbers 33:4 says that these plagues were against the Egyptian gods. This plague was against the goddess Sekhmet.¹⁷ According to an Egyptian museum, Sekhmet was:

“the goddess of the hot desert sun, plague, chaos, war, and healing...she had the body of a woman with a lion head wearing a sun disk...When she was in a calmer state she would take the form of the household cat goddess Bastet... [the Egyptians believed] she could avert plague and cure disease. She was the patron of physicians and healers..In order to stay on her good side, they offered her food and drink, played music for her, and burned incense. They would whisper their prayers into the ears of cat mummies and offer them to Sekhmet.”¹⁸

But this little kitty cat god couldn't heal the Egyptians, no matter how many prayers they offered to cat mummies. They were dealing with the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. As a result, the entire nation of Egypt was not only sick, but

¹⁶ Source: <https://owlcation.com/humanities/Ten-Plagues-For-Ten-Gods> Accessed April 29, 2023

¹⁷ Source: <https://egyptianmuseum.org/deities-sekhmet> Accessed April 29, 2003

¹⁸ *Ibid*

defiled religiously. Religious worship had to cease, because to worship their gods with these boils would have been sacrilege. Later on, the Levitical law reflected a similar prohibition. To have this disease would have required that you be put outside the camp. Leviticus 13:46 “He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.” Egypt as a whole was outside the camp, utterly defiled.

2nd Principle: The defiling of nations

That brings us to our **second principle**: *God’s ordinary way of mercy is to defile a people before He destroys that people.* This plague of boils became a *pattern* for how God deals with a disobedient people from here forward in Scripture. Consider two examples.

1. The people of Israel

First consider that this very plague was what God threatened the nation of Israel with if they broke the covenant. Deuteronomy 28:27 “*The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch, of which you cannot be healed.*”¹⁹ Did you hear it? The 6th plague became a proverbially truth for Israel’s history. If they turned away from the LORD, God would strike them with the boils of Egypt.

2. The people in Revelation

Second consider that this plague was poured out on the people in Revelation. Revelation 16:10-11 “The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the

¹⁹ v.21 says “The LORD will make the pestilence stick to you until he has consumed you off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.” v.35 The LORD will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. *People gnawed their tongues in anguish* ²⁰ and cursed the God of heaven *for their pain and sores.*” Regardless of whether you believe this has already been fulfilled or is waiting to be fulfilled, the point remains, the pattern God established in this plague runs all the way through the Scripture. The point here is not the boils in particular, but rather God defiling a people’s health in general for their rebellion.

Informatory Use

Dear congregation, we have to understand this plague from two aspects.

I. National punishment

First we must understand this plague was *national punishment*. We read it three times in our text. Twice in v.9, this fell on *the land of Egypt*. Once in v.11, it came *upon all the Egyptians*. The book of Exodus is absolutely amazing because it shows us how God deals with *nations*. As one author has said "We fail to have an understanding of the plagues of Egypt if we do not see them as typifying God's judgment on His enemies *in every era.*"²⁰ These are not just stories, they are patterns of how God operates in every era in world history.²¹ Consequently the defiling that we see in our nation right now is both judgment and mercy. Just as Egypt still had more time, so does America. But there is only one solution: *we must as a nation turn back to the Lord*. God stayed His judgments on Nineveh when they repented. Jonah 3:10 “When God saw what they did, how they turned from

²⁰ Rushdoony, pg.105.

²¹ And how God dealt with Egypt is a pattern for how God deals with all other nations. 1 Corinthians 10:6 “Now these things took place as *examples* (τύπος *typos*) for us.” This is what God told Israel after they left Egypt. Leviticus 18:24-25 “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, ²⁵ and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.”

their evil way, *God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them*, and he did not do it.” There’s still hope if America repents. That’s the first aspect of this plague, it was a national punishment.

2. Personal punishment

However—and this is the second aspect of this plague—this defilement was also very *personal*. Each Egyptian was *personally* defiled. You see loved ones, this is a story about all humanity, each and every one of us were born defiled and unclean. Children, boys and girls these Egyptians couldn’t get rid of their boils. If it was the same boils as threatened in Deuteronomy, it was incurable. Likewise you and I can’t make ourselves clean. We can’t heal ourselves. But what we tend to do is we start to compare our boils—or sins—with the sins of others. Children I know you do this, because it’s the human condition. You look at other little boys and girls and think “My sins aren’t as bad as theirs.” But that doesn’t matter in the least. You are *still* infected. Sin has made you unclean. And just as the kitty cat god of the Egyptians couldn’t cure the Egyptians, so nothing on this earth can cure you.

Celebratory Use

But this is *why* the gospel of Jesus Christ is such good news. Do you know where Jesus was crucified at? He was crucified outside the city, outside the camp. Hebrews 13:12 “So Jesus also suffered *outside the gate* in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.” Why did Jesus have to go outside the gate? Because our sin *defiled* Him. The Egyptians were disgusting and defiled, but Jesus Christ became far worse when our sin was placed upon Him. We transmitted the most loathsome disease to our Savior far worse than these boils. He absorbed into His body and soul all our vileness, all our lies, all our lust, all

our unrighteousness, all our murder, all our blasphemy and idolatry. Jesus became the most unclean Being that ever walked the earth. And the only way for Him to be rid of it was to be executed. That's what the cross of Christ was. The removal of all our vile uncleanness by His execution. But He didn't stay dead, He rose again on the third day, and His resurrection means *that we can never be made unclean again*. At the cross we transmitted our disease of sin to Him, but at His resurrection He imputes His righteousness to us. And it's summed up perfectly in one verse. 2 Corinthians 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."²²

What that means is—that at the cross—*Jesus was made just as vile* as you and I *by imputation*.

And—at His resurrection—*we were made just as righteous* as Christ Himself *by imputation*.

That's the good news of the gospel. Not only has our incurable plague been removed, but because we have the righteousness of Christ, we will never be unclean again.

III. The Hardening

3 types of hardness

In spite of everything Pharaoh has seen, he still does not repent. But we see something new here. Look at v.12 "*But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh,*

²² NIV

and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.” Recall that there are three ways the heart is hardened towards God.²³ **First** there is a *natural hardness* that every sinner has since the fall. Every human being is born with a naturally hard heart towards God because of sin (Ezekiel 11:19). **Second** there is a *voluntary hardness*, our hearts become harder when we “willingly reject the counsel of God”²⁴ (Psalm 95:7-8) **Third** there is a *judicial hardness*, which is God’s act of hardening the heart as a judgment for the sinner refusing to repent.²⁵

The first time

Now we know that God told Moses He would harden Pharaoh’s heart before he confronted Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21, 7:23). But what have we seen thus far in the previous plagues? We’ve seen Pharaoh’s *natural hardness*. Exodus 7:13 “Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened” (Also cf. Exodus 7:14, 22; 8:19; 9:7). And we’ve seen Pharaoh *voluntarily harden* his heart. Exodus 8:15 “But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen...” (Also cf. Exodus 8:32) So for the first 5 plagues Pharaoh had a *natural* and *voluntary* hardness. God patiently bore with Pharaoh’s blasphemy and insults and lies again and again. But now God judicially hardens Pharaoh’s heart for his great

²³ Thomas Manton, *The Works of Thomas Manton Vol. XVII*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2020), pg. 196

²⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 196

²⁵ As Manton says “Man hardens, and then God hardens” as a just Judge by punishing him for his sin. *Ibid*, pg. 221

sin.²⁶ Pharaoh rejected the LORD's commands, but he cannot escape the LORD's judgment.

3rd Principle: The justice of hardening

That brings us to our **third principle**: *When a people persists in sin, God justly hardens their heart handing them over to more judgment.* This is the fearful doctrine that the Apostle Paul opens up the book of Romans with. Though all mankind has known God through the things that are created, they have refused to honor Him or give thanks to Him. Therefore three times we read in 1:24, 26, 28 that “God gave them up” to the the lusts of their hearts, the depravity of their wills and to a reprobate mind. The Greek word for God *giving them up*²⁷ is picturesque of a criminal being *delivered over* to a prison. Only here the prison is more sin which piles up more judgment. When God judicially hardens sinners, they give themselves more fully over to the sin. And this is in spite of the sin destroying their lives. So to flesh this out. If God hardens an adulterer in his sin, he will give himself more over to adultery even though it destroys all his relationships and he contracts horrible diseases through it. God hardened Pharaoh's heart and now Pharaoh is giving himself more over to his own sin even though it's insane. He can't beat Yahweh, but it doesn't matter, he has been hardened and now he will run headlong into his own disaster.

²⁶ “And here their ignorance is refuted, who imagine that God is endued with mere prescience; for when “as the LORD has spoken” is added, he attributes both in conjunction to Himself, viz., the effect as well as the foreknowledge.” John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. II*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 180

²⁷ παραδίδομι paradidōmi

Hortatory/Elenctic Use

Dear congregation, this is the world that we have been called to preach the gospel to. Not only to those who have natural hard hearts but to those who have been judicially hardened by God. Romans 1 isn't talking about some imaginary people. Go read the list of sins that follows those who have been judicially hardened and tell me that doesn't perfectly describe our culture. How do we preach to a people who have been given over to this judgment? Can't you hear the objection from your skeptic friend? "How can I repent? If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he has hardened my heart, then there is nothing *I can do*." This is where we need to say *exactly*. There's nothing you can do. You must repent and believe the gospel, but you can't in your own strength. You are too far gone in your sin. But if you don't repent and believe, you will be damned. Dear friends, it's texts like these that force us to see the miracle of conversion. One of the reasons the Church enters into seasons of weakness and lukewarmness is because it treats conversion as if it is something man can do himself. Dear congregation, think of the imagery in the NT that describes the unconverted man.

- The unconverted man is *blind*, he cannot make himself see.
- The unconverted man is *lost*, he cannot make himself found.
- The unconverted man is *dead in sin*, he cannot make himself alive.

The unconverted man must hear how desperate his condition is. He is without hope and without God in the world. All those living outside of Goshen have no hope. Listen to how Charles Spurgeon spoke to the unconverted:

“When you shall feel you are powerless [then] we shall have hope for you, for then you will leave yourselves in the hands of Him who can do all things. When self's strength is gone, God's strength will come...*I do not want to rouse your activity, you unconverted people; I want to rouse you to the conviction that you are lost, and I pray God the Holy Spirit may convince you.*”²⁸

So back to the skeptic who says “How can I repent? If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he has hardened my heart, then there is nothing *I can do*.” You answer, “...there's nothing you can do. No amount of activity or works or well-wishing will make you right with God. Only the power of God can transform you. Only God can take out your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Only God give sight to your blind eyes, only God can find your lost soul, only God can raise you from the dead. You can do nothing. Cry out to Him, throw yourself upon the mercy seat, that He might do this for you.”²⁹ That's how we are to preach the gospel to the lost. They need to hear that their condition could not be more desperate. They need to hear that their only hope, their only comfort in life in death, is if the LORD saves them.

²⁸ Iain Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), pg. 53

²⁹ A famous story illustrates this dilemma very well. A 19th century gospel preacher Benjamin Palmer was approached by a young man on a Monday morning who heard him preach the day before. And he was agitated. He told Pastor Palmer “You preachers are the most contradictory men in the world; you say, and you unsay....yesterday you said in your sermon that sinners are perfectly helpless in themselves—utterly unable to repent or believe *and then* turned square round and said that they would all be damned if they did not.” Pastor Palmer who was a wise man simply said “Well...there is no use quarreling over this matter; either you can or you cannot not. If you can, all I have to say is that I hope you will just go and do it.” As I did not raise my eyes from my writing, which was continued as I spoke, I had no means of marking the effect of these words, until after a moment's silence, with a choking utterance, the reply came back: ‘I have been trying my best for three whole days, and cannot?’ “Ah, said I, laying down my pen: that puts a different face upon it; we will go then and tell the difficulty straight out to God. We knelt together and I prayed as though this was the first time in human history that this trouble had ever arisen; that here was a soul in the most desperate extremity, which must believe or perish, and hopelessly unable of itself, to do it; that, consequently it was just the case of calling for Divine interposition; and pleading most earnestly for the fulfilment of the Divine promise. Upon rising I offered not a single word of comfort or advice ... So I left my friend in his powerlessness in the hands of God, as the only helper. In a short time he came through the struggle, rejoicing in the hope of eternal life.” *Ibid*, pg. 16-17

The Lord mocks them...

Dear congregation, when God was pouring out terrible judgments on the Egyptians, it was because He was preparing a wonderful deliverance for His people. These plagues are a vindication of God's covenant promise: "I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you." It's no wonder *why* David wrote Psalm 2 hundreds of years later. I wonder if he had Pharaoh in mind?

"Why do the nations rage And the peoples meditate on a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand. And the rulers take counsel together Against Yahweh and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!"

He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord mocks them. Then He speaks to them in His anger. And terrifies them in His fury, *saying*, "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain."

"I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like a potter's vessel.'"

So now, O kings, show insight; Take warning, O judges of the earth. Serve Yahweh with fear. And rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

No one can defeat the LORD. It is laughable. That was true in Pharaoh's day. And it is still true today.

