

Text: Exodus 7:14-25

Title: "When diplomacy ends"

Time: 6/28/20 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Adolf Hitler is credited with the phrase, "When diplomacy ends, war begins." History remembers Hitler as the warmonger who caused WW2, not a diplomat who prevented war. For him, his is mantra became less a warning against failing to be diplomatic than a call to arms.

But his statement is certainly true, and Pharaoh and Egypt are beginning to find it so in our passage. Rejecting the Lord's gracious diplomacy, the leader of Egypt invites the war between himself and the God of heaven to begin. God's judgment begins slowly in our passage, and the slowness with which Yahweh reacts to Pharaoh's stubborn resistance is very simply the product of His amazing long-suffering toward sinful people like you and me.

Moses sees the perfections of the Lord's glory in Exod. 34:6, "And the Lord passed by before him [Moses], and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."

Num. 14:8 reiterates, "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty [note that it is the nature of the longsuffering that requires this clarification], visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." Hitler did not get off scot-free.

Jeremiah actually objects to the longsuffering of the Lord toward his persecutors: "O Lord, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take

me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke” (Jer. 15:15). Jeremiah would have been far less longsuffering than the Lord was.

The NT affirms this truth in Rom. 2:4, “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” Repent or despise disrespectfully. Those are the two possible responses to God’s longsuffering.

Rom. 9:22-23 says, “What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.” Every vessel of the riches of God’s glory was once a vessel of wrath experiencing His longsuffering.

Paul knew this was true for him. “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1 Tim. 1:16).

2 Pet. 3:9 speaks of the Lord’s will in the matter: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Clearly, God’s longsuffering is a gospel diplomacy offering merciful salvation through the death of Christ, which He extends to every sinner as He patiently awaits their repentance from sin and faith in Him. But our passage is clear that there comes a time in the work of God with the sinner when diplomacy ends, and the war with God that sinner has chosen for himself begins. Pharaoh has reached the time in his

dealings with the God of Israel that diplomacy has ended, and war is beginning. Our passage covers the first of the ten plagues. Notice three things with me this morning about the end of diplomacy between Pharaoh and his God.

### I. The hard heart of Pharaoh thwarts diplomacy (v. 14).

Illustration: Hitler's hard-hearted leadership of the German military in WW2 is infamous. In November 1942 Germany's 6th Army found itself surrounded in Stalingrad by the Red Army who wanted their city back, which the Nazis had taken earlier that year in a battle that caused an estimated 2 million casualties. The German commander requested permission to abandon the city and fall back, but Hitler stubbornly ordered them to not move. 250,000 German soldiers were either lost or captured there over the next few months.

Application: The Lord tells Moses that Pharaoh's heart has hardened. In this verse, the word is the one that basically means *immovable* or *too heavy to move*. In the previous verse, the word is the one that means *to become strong* or *to stiffen*. In verse 13, the hard heart refuses to listen. In verse 14, the hard heart refuses to obey. Then in verse 22, the hard heart strengthens so as not to listen again, and in verse 23, the hard heart remains untouched by the circumstances of a bloody Nile.

How can this be? Military historians look back on Hitler's foolish stubbornness with disgust. How could he be so stupidly hardened at the price of so many lives? Bible students look back on Pharaoh and wonder how he could be so stubbornly hard. Our text indicates that Pharaoh had help keeping his heart hard. The magicians of Egypt play their role again. They manufacture a lie that counterfeits and

substitutes for the Lord's miracle. The lie causes Pharaoh's heart to despise the long-suffering of the Lord and to refuse to repent. He did not listen, and he did not obey.

The soothsayers were the wisemen of their day. What lies have the wisemen of our day told us, which keep our hearts stubbornly hard against the Lord's will for our lives, even His gracious offer of salvation through the precious sacrifice of His own Son for sin? Why does it make more sense for you and I to refuse to listen to the Lord and to determine to disobey Him than it did for Pharaoh? Could it be that the enemy of our souls is doing to us what it did to him? How much longer can we count on the Lord's diplomacy? The hard heart of Pharaoh thwarted the opportunity God's diplomacy had given to him. Ours will do the same unless we repent.

II. God's Word warns of the end of diplomacy (vv. 15-18).

Illustration: Pagans have always worship the creature rather than the Creator. They still do so today. On September 19 of last year, Fox News reported that "students at Union Theological Seminary in New York City were instructed to confess to potted plants as an 'expression of worship' and as a 'liturgical response to our climate crisis'" [<https://www.foxnews.com/faith-values/liberal-seminary-students-worship-plants>; accessed 6/25/20]. Many of the ministers of the Presbyterian Church USA, the denomination to which the Community Church of our town belongs, have been educated at Union.

The Bible is clear that the practice of worshipping the creature rather than the Creator is as old as idolatry itself. Egypt worshipped the Nile. A significant hymn of that worship has come down to us from the Middle Kingdom. It is simply called, "The Hymn of the Nile." Let me read some of

what Pharaoh and his people would have been singing about in their times of worship. It begins:

“Hail to thee, O Nile! Who manifests thyself over this land, and comes to give life to Egypt! Mysterious is thy issuing forth from the darkness, on this day whereon it is celebrated! Watering the orchards created by Re, to cause all the cattle to live, you give the earth to drink, inexhaustible one! Path that descends from the sky, loving the bread of Seb and the first-fruits of Nepera, You cause the workshops of Ptah to prosper!

“Lord of the fish, during the inundation, no bird alights on the crops. You create the grain, you bring forth the barley, assuring perpetuity to the temples.” Here is how it ends:

“O inundation of the Nile, offerings are made unto you, men are immolated [offered as a burnt sacrifice] to you, great festivals are instituted for you. Birds are sacrificed to you, gazelles are taken for you in the mountain, pure flames are prepared for you. Sacrifice is mettle to every god as it is made to the Nile. The Nile has made its retreats in Southern Egypt, its name is not known beyond the Tuau. The god manifests not his forms, He baffles all conception.

“Men exalt him like the cycle of the gods, they dread him who creates the heat, even him who has made his son the universal master in order to give prosperity to Egypt. Come (and) prosper! Come (and) prosper! O Nile, come (and) prosper! O you who make men to live through his flocks and his flocks through his orchards! Come (and) prosper, come, O Nile, come (and) prosper!”

Application: And so we can understand why it is that God instructs Moses to go to meet Pharaoh, who would be early on the banks of the Nile worshipping this creature rather

than the Creator. Keil and Delitzsch: "Both time and place are of significance here. Pharaoh went out in the morning to the Nile (ver. 15, chap. viii. 20), not merely to take a refreshing walk, or to bathe in the river, or to see how high the water had risen, but without doubt to present his daily worship to the Nile, which was honoured by the Egyptians as their supreme deity" (1.478).

Moses says nothing to or for the Nile. As diplomacy ends for Pharaoh, God graciously sends Moses to him with the warning of His holy Word. God tells Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'God says.'" What does God say? He says He is Yahweh, the God of the Bible. He says He is the God of the Hebrews. He says He is the one who sent Moses to Pharaoh. He says He wants His people to be allowed to worship Him. He says, "You have not obeyed me." He says I am going to strike, with My own staff in My own hand, the Nile you have come to worship this morning. He says its waters will be turned into blood. He says the fish will die and the Nile will stink. He says, "You will not have water to drink." He says, "You will know that I am Yahweh" (v. 17).

The Bible is clear, that some day every single person will know that Yahweh is God. Paul spoke of the exaltation of Christ, incarnate Yahweh, in these terms: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). The warning of God's Word for us is clear, and it comes to us prior to the end of diplomacy, before the start of war. Now is the time to bow. Whether by

gracious diplomacy or judging war, every knee shall bow to Christ. What we do with that warning is up to us.

III. God's hand executes the end of diplomacy (vv. 19-25).

Illustration: Ipuwer, the wiseman of Egypt's Middle Kingdom who wrote "Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage," remembers this end of diplomacy in his poem. He writes: "The river is blood! As you drink of it you lose your humanity and thirst for water" (Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?*, 150).

Application: God decides when it is time for His diplomacy with the sinner who despises His longsuffering refusing to repent to end. This morning, you and I have been recipients of "the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering." Will we despise these things refusing to know that they are for leading us to repentance from our sin and faith in Christ for salvation? Will we refuse to listen and refuse to obey?

Pharaoh returns home from his worship time at the Nile with the water of his god turned to blood, dead fish floating ashore, and a putrid stench of what has happened in his nostrils. With some bewilderment, Moses records that none of this affected Pharaoh's heart. His subjects soon found water enough digging around the Nile, and seven days later the blood turned back into water again, and all seemed well.

Conclusion: But all was not well. Diplomacy had ended. Pharaoh was now at war with the one true God. With this mercifully slow start to the judgments of this war, surrender was still open to this hard-hearted man.

And so it is for us this morning. In our war with God, surrender is our only path to true victory over all that threatens our ruin. In patient love He extends to us His gracious longsuffering, and we must not fail to repent, listen, and obey as we trust in Him.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*