

Text: Exodus 9:13-35

Title: "The heart of the matter"

Time: 8/9/2020 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The parsonage dryer needed fixing a couple of weeks ago. The dryer would start just fine when you push in the start button, but when you released the start button, it would stop again.

At first, the fix seemed obvious to me. I simply went outside, picked up one of the many heavy rocks we have around here, and showed my wife how we can lean the rock against the start button so that it stays depressed and keeps the dryer running. That worked one or two times until the switch for the start button also broke.

Eventually, with the help of some Youtube videos, I was able to get to the heart of the matter. The fix would require more than a surface approach. After replacing the starter switch I had broken, I then proceeded to take apart the machine so that I could get to what seemed to be the least reachable part of the entire machine – a switch that senses whether the dryer belt is broken so as to turn off the dryer that has a broken belt.

In our passage, we have come to the seventh plague, the one in which God uses thundering, hail, and fire or lightning to judge Egypt, and in doing so the Lord once again is getting to the heart of the matter. His work is never an inadequate surface fix. The word *heart* appears four times in this passage with reference to the hearts of many people whose lives need to be fixed (vv. 14, 21, 34-35). Pharaoh's heart is at the top of that list. It is in Pharaoh's heart that we see the heart of the matter when it comes to the need of every sinner, ourselves included.

I have titled the message this morning, "The heart of the matter," and I want to see how both the Lord and Pharaoh focus on Pharaoh's heart. When it comes to getting to the heart of the matter of our own hearts, only the Lord and ourselves have a say in the outcome. God can have a purpose for my heart, and I can. God can minister a treatment that changes my heart, and so can I. No one else really can in the same sense.

What is true for my heart is true for Pharaoh's. I want us to notice how God's purpose for Pharaoh's heart is different than Pharaoh's purpose, and how God's treatment of Pharaoh's heart is different than Pharaoh's treatment.

I. God's purpose for Pharaoh's heart was God's glory (vv. 13-16).

Illustration: The reason my rock idea failed to fix the dryer was really very simple. The dryer was designed by an engineer and manufactured by a manufacturer, and neither the designer nor the manufacturer made the dry to be fixed by a rock that you find in your yard. Rocks serve a different purpose than dryers. Those purposes do not intersect, no matter how much I might try to make them one and the same.

Application: God's creatures, you and I and Pharaoh included, are very much like that dryer. We were made for a specific purpose, and when we break, we are no longer able to accomplish that purpose. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, used by generations past to pass the Christian faith on to younger generations, is a series of questions and answers that begins with this one: "What is the chief end [purpose] of man?" The catechism answers that question this way, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever."

The catechism references the following Scriptures in support:

1 Cor. 10:31. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Rom. 11:36. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Ps. 73:24-26. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

John 17:22, 24. "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one... Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

Our passage also supports this understanding, for it is clear that God's purpose for Pharaoh's heart was that it should glorify the Lord. Pharaoh was to do so by recognizing the Lord's worthiness to be worshipped (v. 13), by recognizing that no one is comparable to the Lord (v. 14), and by seeing the Lord's power in such a way that he would spend his life declaring His name throughout the earth (v. 16; note that the KJV translators put the word *in* in italics: *shew in thee my power = shew thee my power*).

Pharaoh lives his life in such a way that he fails to see the importance of worshipping the Lord, compares many other things in his life with the Lord and finds them far better,

and cares nothing at all about declaring God's name throughout the earth.

But God had a purpose for Pharaoh's heart, and it is His purpose for ours as well. He has designed and engineered us to worship Him, to recognize that none compare with Him, and to declare His name throughout the earth by making disciples of the nations and baptizing them in that holy Trinitarian name (Matt. 28:19-20). This is the heart of the matter of human existence. This is the chief end of man. Repurposing the human condition only breaks it further.

II. Pharaoh's purpose for Pharaoh's heart was his own glory (vv. 17-18).

Illustration: We have had some beautiful weather since deciding that it is best for us to meet outdoors for a while. Mark helped us to reflect on that during a time of shared blessing last Sunday. Every week I check the 10-day forecast on my phone for the next Sunday to come. One reason I must do that is that I cannot bring rain from the sky, nor keep it from coming.

Application: The Lord is not someone who has to check to see what the next Sunday's weather will bring. He is the one who brings rain and withholds it. He not only can bring rain, He can bring destructive storms, hail included. He can do so "this time tomorrow" if He so desires. As He does so, He has a perfect record in mind of what every storm was like throughout the history of Egypt, and so He can say that this one is going to be the worse yet.

But in spite of all this, Pharaoh exalts himself instead of this One. He tells the One who can do all that, "No - I am going to do what I want, not what You want." Pharaoh's purpose for his own heart was his own glory. Self was enthroned. His

kingdom was crumbling around him, his river worship was interrupted with the warnings of God for more destruction, but still he determines that he would exalt himself rather than the Lord.

Pharaoh can exalt himself no more than dryers can fix themselves, but make no mistake, an important part of God's fixing sinners is His exaltation of them in Christ. It is when we refuse to exalt ourselves that we find the Lord's purpose is to exalt the humble. 1 Peter 5:5-6, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

III. God's treatment of Pharaoh's heart was merciful (vv. 19-26, 31-33).

Illustration: On Tuesday morning the men praying together were reflecting on the way it is typical for us sinners to blame God for the bad but not give Him any credit for the good. When things are good, we forget about God. When things are bad, we say it is His fault.

Application: I must say that as I have studied the ten plagues of Egypt, my thinking about the way God executed these plagues has been corrected. I always understood from my childhood's Sunday School lessons that God brought harsh circumstances down in judgment against the Egyptians. What I am only now appreciating, however, is how much God remembers mercy in this work of judgment. We have already seen this mercy extended in yet another pleading warning to Pharaoh, which explains God's true purpose of blessing for him, which he rejects in self-exaltation.

Now the judgment falls, but still God remembers mercy in the midst of judgment:

- He gives instructions for getting men and animals to shelter and time to do so (vv. 19-21). What ultimately determines whether cattle and servants survive is the condition of the householder's heart, not the hail. The hail could be avoided. The failure to fear the word of the Lord sealed the fate.
- Thunder accompanies the hail (vv. 22-25). Every golfer knows that thunder is very helpful when it comes to avoiding storms. Someone blows the horn, and everyone gets off the course. God sends thunder that announces the approach of the storm.
- The land of Goshen is spared again (v. 26). Maybe consider moving there?
- Much food is destroyed, but not all of it (vv. 31-32). Ipuwer ("Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage"): "Gone is the grain of abundance. Food supplies are running short. The nobles hunger and suffer. Upper Egypt has become a wasteland. Grain is lacking on every side. The storehouse is bare. Women say, 'Oh that we had something to eat!'" God heard the cry of those women.
- The prayer ascends and the plague comes to an end (v. 33).

God's treatment of Pharaoh's heart is very merciful. His treatment of ours has been even more so. But Pharaoh's treatment of his own heart was the opposite.

IV. Pharaoh's treatment of Pharaoh's heart was destructive (vv. 27-30, 34-35).

Illustration: Honestly, I knew in my heart of hearts that something was wrong with trying to use that rock to address the dryer problem. Sure enough, I only made matters worse.

Application: Pharaoh understands something very valuable in the heart of his heart according to verse 27. But he wants the hail to stop in a way that he does not want his wickedness and sin to stop. So what he does is harden his heart, and in so doing he hardens the hearts of his servants as well (v. 34).

Verse 34 uses the word *heavy* for *hard* – he makes his heart too heavy to be moved to change; and verse 35 uses the word *strengthen* or *stiffen* for *hard* – he reaffirms his independent strength and his ability to do without the true God. This treatment of his own heart is self-destructive.

Conclusion: Scripture teaches us to see a third party involved at this point: “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Jesus said Satan is a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies. He lies to sinners and murders them. The lie says that self-exaltation is the chief end of man. The act of murder is his convincing us to harden our heart against the Lord in spite of knowing in our heart of hearts – the Lord is righteous, and I am a sinner.

Perhaps this morning your eyes will open to see your true purpose – to glorify God, worship Him, and proclaim His name, and perhaps you will see the mercy of His judgments, especially in that of the cross. God’s work of judgment is so merciful, He was willing to provide in His own Son the

needed propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

“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*