

EXODUS

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Exodus 9-10 Responding to God

We are going to Exodus 9 today.

We are in the middle of the plagues - not a very Christmassy passage, but a lot of Christmas passages aren't very Christmassy either - it's not all tidings of comfort and joy for every individual. When God breaks in to human history, whether in Egypt or Bethlehem, there are ripples and tensions. Because God comes in to reign, and everybody who clings to a throne, whether it's Herod, or Pharaoh, or whether it is us, at first won't receive the good news of God's reign as good news at all. We will feel threatened and displaced by it. And rather than receive it with joy and peace, we often receive it with resistance and fear.

The people who easily received the news with joy and peace were those who knew they had little going for them and needed a rescue. The people who had everything to lose resisted.

Those who knew their great need for a Savior rejoiced. Those who were poor in spirit were blessed. But those who thought they were OK on their own, who didn't want to give up power over their own lives, *resisted*. Everytime God intervenes in history, whether it is in Egypt or in Bethlehem or in our lives, those are the two responses.

Joy and peace. Or fear and resistance.

Now God will often take those who fear and resist and bring them to a point where they see this as a message of joy and peace. And often it is through a process of shaking what they are clinging to until they let go and cling to Him.

And in this passage in Exodus, God is breaking in to human history and there are people who believe and are rescued and end this section of the Exodus narrative with a song, and there are those who resist to the end, and end up in the sea.

But all along, God is exposing the lies of their false gods so they might know the One who is true, He gives repeated opportunities to know Him, and will not fail in His plan to draw out a free people who are worshippers of Him alone and not enslaved to anybody.

And in doing so He is doing what He said He would do when He made a promise to Abraham - all the nations would be blessed through Him. So even the gentile Egyptians are being offered the knowledge of God in this story.

And we pick up in chapter 9.

So far, the Nile has turned to blood, frogs have covered the land, gnats and flies have swarmed, the cattle died (but not the cattle in Goshen where the Jews had settled,) boils broke out on everyone. With increasing discomfort and damage, each plague is harshly showing the superior glory of God.

9:13 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. 14 For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. 15 For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. 16 But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. 17 You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go. 18 Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. 19 Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.'" 20 Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, 21 but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field.

22 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt." 23 Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. 24 There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the

land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. 26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail.

27 Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, "This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. 28 Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." 29 Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's. 30 But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God." 31 (The flax and the barley were struck down, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. 32 But the wheat and the emmer² were not struck down, for they are late in coming up.) 33 So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and stretched out his hands to the LORD, and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth. 34 But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. 35 So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

So look at what God is doing here and how all of the people are responding to Him.

So what is God doing?

9:16 But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

God is making sure that His name will be known in all the earth. He said in chapter 7 that he was acting so Pharaoh might know that he is the Lord, and that the Egyptians would know that He is the Lord.

So why?

Why is it so necessary that people come to believe in one god as opposed to another.

Because in many ways the Egyptians seemed fine believing in their gods. I'm sure there were plenty of Egyptians who were good neighbors, hard workers, who were devoted to their families. Not worshipping the Hebrew God didn't hold them back that much in establishing a great civilization. We still don't know how they pulled off the pyramids.

They were obviously a culture that had plenty of brilliant mathematicians and engineers and artists. They understood agriculture and even produced enough to feed the whole known world during the famine in Genesis.

It seems like the Egyptians were doing just fine. Why the need to convert them?

This whole idea of converting people today can seem useless and even juvenile, where we seem to be saying, "My god can beat up your god, so believe in my god instead." Why this desire to convert? Why this desire on Yahweh's part to be known, and for other religions and gods to be forsaken?

And isn't this completely against our sensibilities today? We say that people should be tolerant of all religions, and the only ones we can't tolerate are the ones that claim to be the only right one. You do you, but don't tell me to be you.

And our culture's dogma is that all roads lead to heaven, that we are all climbing up a ladder, and our ladders are leaning against different sides of the building, but we will all eventually get to the same rooftop. As long as we are all sincere in our beliefs, we will get there. The muslims climb up their ladder, the jews climb up theirs, the Christians climb up theirs, but in the end we'll all be at the same rooftop party for eternity.

So any efforts to convert people or to claim a religion is right as compared to the others seem incredibly arrogant and almost primitive to us today.

But here in Exodus, God wants to be known. He wants to prove that the gods of Egypt are no gods at all. He wants people to be converted to faith in Him and to forsake other gods. And that theme runs all through the Old and New Testament. The first commandment is to have no other Gods before Him.

So what do we do with what looks like an intolerant religion in the bible? Haven't we moved past all of that? And does Christianity really claim to be the only way?

Well Christianity does claim that Jesus is the only way. That the only way to peace with God is personally knowing Jesus.

Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

This is not a claim that one church or one denomination is the only true way. There are legitimate believing Christians in most Christian denominations. Some of those denominations do a better job than others at remaining faithful, but I've sometimes even been surprised to meet genuine Christians even in churches that I would consider to be on the very edge of believing a false gospel, at best.

So God has lots of people in lots of kinds of churches. But there is salvation in only one name: Jesus. Jesus is the only way.

This Yahweh who shows up in Exodus to make His name known and to call even kings to bow before Him is the same God that showed up in the manger to begin to make His name known again and to cause kings and nations to bow. Christianity says there is only one true God, and the one way to peace with Him is through the cross of Jesus.

And this idea, among a few others, is among the most repulsive ideas to our culture today. In his book, *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller discusses a number of challenges to the idea that Christianity is the one true religion.

Challenge #1: "All major religions are equally valid and basically teach the same thing."

And it is true that among the major religions, morality is similar. Everyone says not to murder or steal. Which is why people can look at the moral code within Christianity and the moral codes in other religions and say, "They're all basically the same."

Just by hard thinking and philosophy you will come up with a moral code that overlaps significantly with Christianity without believing in Jesus.

But that's a lot different from saying that Christianity is the same as other world religions and that all religions are equally valid.

Nobody really thinks all religions are equally valid.

We wouldn't say the religion of Westboro Baptist Church is equally valid with other churches. We wouldn't say that the Heavens Gate cult that thought Jesus was returning on a UFO and committed mass suicide is on par with all other religions. They're not all basically the same. We wouldn't say that a religion that practices child-sacrifice or cannibalism is OK and just as valid as any other.

Everyone knows there are some religions at least that aren't as valid as others. So we all say that some ways of worship, some beliefs are wrong, some practices are wrong.

Challenge #2: "Because God loves everybody, doctrines aren't important."

This belief says that doctrine is not important, but then teaches a doctrine that is contrary to all major religions. This view holds a specific view of God which is touted as superior and more enlightened than the beliefs of all major religions. So those who hold this view do the very thing they can't stand in others: insist that their religion is superior.

So everybody thinks their beliefs about God are right, otherwise they wouldn't believe them. And to say that specific beliefs don't matter is a specific belief.

Challenge #3: "God is too big and awesome for any one religion to see all the truth about Him, they all see part of the whole truth."

The classic illustration is three blind men running into an elephant, and they all run into a different part. One guy runs into the trunk and says, "An elephant is long and flexible – its like a snake." Another guy runs into the side and says, "Are you crazy? An elephant is flat and huge and rough and hairy." The third guy runs into the leg and says, "Flat? An elephant is round like a tree trunk."

So people say that's the way religions are. Everybody runs into God, a Muslim says one thing, a Jew says one thing, a Christian says one thing, but they are all feeling the same thing. Nobody can see the whole truth – in fact, it is arrogant to say that you can.

And certainly it would be arrogant for the guy holding a trunk to try to convert everybody to "elephants are long and flexible."

But the problem with that argument is that if you're saying this stuff, you are claiming to see the whole truth. You are claiming to be able to see who God really is while all these other guys are blind and only seeing part of it.

So you're saying that no religion can see the whole truth, except for your religion that sees it all. So you're no better off than these arrogant exclusivist Christians.

Challenge #4: It is arrogant to insist your religion is right and to try to convert others to it."

Answer: It is no more narrow to claim that one religion is right than to claim that one

way to think about all religions (namely that all religions are equal) is right. We all think we're right, and we all try to convert others.

WE ALL TRY TO CONVERT PEOPLE TO OUR BELIEFS, ALL THE TIME.

If you hear a song you like, you play it for a friend, because something about your enjoyment in it is completed when someone else enjoys it.

You try a new food and its great, and you are instantly saying, "Here, try this!" And something is complete when their eyes light up and enjoy it too. So its not narrow-minded to try to convert people – we all do it.

And for Christians, the message of Jesus is so good, that of course we're always saying, "Taste this." "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!" - Psalm 34:8

So the question is not whether we try to convert people. It is what do we try to convert them to.

And it's true that the attempt to bring people to believe in the God of the Bible has often gone wrong and been done badly. We probably all know people who are arrogant and angry and who beat people over the head with the bible, who don't listen, who aren't kind.

But usually, the people who try to convert like that need to be converted themselves, or at least need the truths of the Gospel to work their way deeper into their souls.

What we need to be the people who peacefully and graciously share Christ is to have the message of the Exodus move deeply into our minds.

Because the message of the Exodus is the message of the Gospel.

In fact, in Luke 9, Jesus takes Peter and James and John up on a mountain to pray and to be transfigured before them. And some guests show up:

Luke 9:28-31 "28Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. 30And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, 31who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure,^b which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

So Jesus is praying, and suddenly becomes dazzling white. And then Moses shows up. And they talk about Jesus's departure. But the greek word for departure there is "exodon" - *exodus*. Jesus accomplished an exodus for us by dying and rising again.

They were rescued from slavery to Pharaoh, we were rescued from slavery to sin. They were liberated from false Gods so that they might serve and submit to the true God, a God who frees. We, too, were liberated from our false gods and bad ultimates in our lives and freed to submit to God. They were led out by God's presence in fire and smoke, we were led out by God with us, Immanuel, who was "born his people to deliver."

The Gospel message is the message that we were slaves to sin and hopeless to liberate ourselves. But God stepped in, obeyed for us, died for us, rose for us - and guarantees that all who will bow before Him will also rise in the same way. He leads us out in our Exodus.

And believing that that is what happened to us should make us only the right kind of people who spread our faith and believe Jesus is the only way.

First, we will have a strong respect for people who don't believe what we do.

They're made in the image of God. And we shouldn't be shocked when they are more moral than we are, or smarter than we are, or have admirable virtues in their lives. Because we weren't rescued because we were moral or smart or more virtuous. So we can see really admirable good works in the lives of those who don't believe and a lot to respect. People who were rescued from slavery can't be arrogant against other slaves. We are only always right with God because He intervened with great wonders on our behalf and rescued us.

Second, we will never spread our faith by manipulation or violence

We became Christians because God gave us eyes to see his beauty, He resurrected us spiritually, He gave us faith. And that whole thing is so miraculous that we know we could never replicate it by forcing someone to believe, by trying to pass laws that everybody has to be Christians, or by emotionally manipulating people. We speak, we pray, and we live out our faith in front of people and serve them in love. But we don't force anyone to be a Christian - you can't be forced into it.

Third, we'll be incredibly tolerant.

But not the kind of tolerance that says everybody's right. That's simply not true, it's not possible for everybody to be right. But the kind of tolerance that says I would rather die than have somebody who is wrong treated badly. We treat our enemies how Jesus

treated us when we were His enemies. We lay down our lives for them. We speak hard truths, but we let God do judging, and the convicting, and the saving.

Fourth, we will expect that any power we have to convert anybody comes from God and not from us.

Isaiah 55:11 “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

We have confidence in the power of God’s word, so we don’t have to force results.

And God uses his word in all kinds of surprising ways. And will make sure He has a people who trust him.

You see it here in Egypt. Pharaoh keeps getting more calloused and unresponsive to God, but not everybody is.

In fact, look at 9:20 again **“20 Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, 21 but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field.**

There are people responding to God even among Pharaoh’s servants. They’re believing the word of the Lord, and the way you know they are believing the word of the Lord is that they stay inside when the Lord said the hail was coming, and they get their servants and livestock inside, too.

And what a great picture this is of what it means to believe. They know God’s word is true, and, trusting his word, they respond with action.

James 2:14-18 “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

The book of James says that faith without works is dead. Real faith produces an active response to God.

They couldn't say, "We believe in God" but then not respond to God's clear warning. Moses didn't predict a deadly hail, and they responded by saying, "We believe that deep down in our hearts!" and then go out into the field anyways.

Because real, heart-level belief always produces real, life-level response.

So how does that not make the equation "Faith plus works = salvation?"

Because faith is not just that we have good feelings about God. It's that we lay hold of who God truly is for us.

Because faith is trust in God as a good Father.

Our tendency to add something to Jesus's work in legalism says that God isn't a good and generous Father who provides all we need as his children: it doubts the goodness of God.

But another way we express that lack of faith in God as a good Father is we treat his commandments like they're not good for us. God commands us to restrict us and hurt us as opposed to bless us.

One enemy of grace is legalism, but another enemy of grace is called antinomianism - being "against the law." Both say God isn't good.

And we can't claim to love and trust God (which is what it is to be a christian), but be against his commandments, treating them like they're hurtful or outdated or would be anything but the best for us.

We can't say "I've come to trust in the lavish goodness of the lawgiver, and I think his commands are bad for me." If we trust in God, we trust in all of God. If he is generous and loving, then his commands are generous and loving too.

And we'll say, "God is so good and loving that He accepts me the way I am, so I don't want to get straight-jacketed by his laws. What God wants most is for me to be me - so I'll stay the way I am and be true to myself." - But that just reveals we don't trust God's goodness. "His commands will hurt me."

We think He's a bad father who, if we ask him for bread, will give us a stone or a snake.

He gave us his son.

How could we doubt his goodness, his love, or that He is out for our good?

Faith in the God who gave us the cross is also faith in the God who gave us commands.

So does God accept us just the way we are? While we're still sinners and commandment breakers?

It is true that God will accept anyone who turns to him, it's not true that God accepts us the way we are and is cool with us staying that way. God accepts us despite the way we are, and then transforms us into the image of his son. Without that transformation and new conformity of life, we do not have any evidence that we were ever his in the first place.

So real faith must produce works, because the nature of saving faith is TRUST IN GOD. Who gave us his son, and gave us his commands.

This is the relationship between faith and works. "Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone."

Jesus claims not to be one more god, but the only True God. And to follow Jesus is to make Him Lord of all and let Him shape how we live.

If our Christianity hasn't changed anything: how we spend our time, the goals and dreams we have for our kids, how we handle conflict, what we do with sex, what we do with our money - if those things have been completely unchanged by our Christianity, we probably just have a great emotional church experience, we don't have Jesus as our God.

Jesus disrupts our previous lives when He enters. He comes in to reign.

So when we hear the word of God, the call on our lives is to repent and believe. To repent - turn from our own rule of our lives. And believe, trust in Christ and all He is for us.

And there's a warning in this passage: when we hear the message of God, it always does something. It always either moves us closer to God as we receive it by faith and repentance. Or, it causes us to become more callous because we didn't receive it that way.

Which is what is happening to Pharaoh. Over and over, these plagues are met with Pharaoh's hardness of heart. Early on it seems Pharaoh is hardening his own heart. But after 5 plagues, when the 6th plague came, the boils, it says this:

Exodus 9:12 "But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

The the hail comes, and Pharaoh doesn't respond. Later some locusts come and devour what's left of the crops, and

Exodus 10:20 "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go.

Then darkness comes and Pharaoh doesn't respond:

Exodus 10:27 "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go."

It seems Pharaoh has opportunities to respond to God, but instead hardens his heart. And then the scriptures say God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

It's a debated concept, why would God harden his heart so he wouldn't respond?

The answer Romans gives is:

Romans 9:17-18 "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, y"For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

Hebrews 3:7-8 "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,b"Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,on the day of testing in the wilderness,But look at Pharaoh: his heart was hardened.

Proverbs 28:14 "Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity."

We get flippancy: I'll turn to him any time I want.

But at the very least, this is a warning that you won't always want to.

So he says, "Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart. And you will if you don't turn to Him."

This message of God doesn't leave us neutral. Hearing it again and again either draws us towards Him and the peace that He offers, or moves us away from Him.

Those who believe and bow have peace with God. Those who refuse get harder.

So today, Grace Road, if you hear His voice, don't harden your heart.

Confess the sin he is convicting you of, turn from it, renounce your own rule over your life.

Scriptures Referenced:

Luke 2:8-14 (Call to worship)

Exodus 9:13-35

Exodus 9:16

Acts 4:12

Luke 9:28-31

Isaiah 55:11

Exodus 9:20-21

James 2:14-18

Exodus 9:12

Exodus 10:20

Exodus 10:27

Romans 9:17-18

Hebrews 3:7-8

Proverbs 28:14

done

Exodus 9-10

Responding to God

I. The One True God (Exodus 9:16)

II. The Response of Faith (Exodus 9:20-21)

III. The Risk of a Hardened Heart (9:12, 10:20, 10:27)

For discussion in small groups:

- 1) What difficulties do you encounter in clinging to the exclusive truth-claims of Christianity? (In your own mind? In conversations with others?)
- 2) Why don't these beliefs make Christians arrogant, intolerant, or violent?
- 3) What is the relationship between faith and works? If we are always sinful, even after conversion, what should our expectations of changed lives really be?
- 4) What does it mean to harden our hearts?
- 5) How can our hearts be made softer toward God?