

THE LORD IS REDEEMER

Exodus 5:1-14:31

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Introduction

“Just you wait, just you wait.” That’s the refrain uttered again and again throughout the opening song of the 2015 musical *Hamilton*, “Just you wait.” The premise behind this phrase, and really the motivation throughout Alexander Hamilton’s life, is this man who came from nothing, pigeon-holed by the world as to who he could be and what he could do, fighting to prove to himself and everyone else that he could be great and do great things. “Just you wait,” thus, is this opening salvo whereby we’re told to watch this man show who he really is.

I can’t help, then, but think of this line when Moses first comes to Pharaoh to ask for permission for Israel to worship the LORD and Pharaoh responds, “Who is the LORD that I should obey him by letting Israel go?” (Exodus 5:2a). Who is the LORD? Well, boy, Pharaoh, just you wait.

You see, last week we began this new series through the book of the Exodus, and we highlighted how the Exodus not only tells the story of these very real events whereby God rescues the Israelites from slavery and then makes them His people, but also how the Exodus provides us with the paradigm for understanding the Bible and understanding the human condition. We have to be freed *from* slavery to death and sin and then freed *to* truly knowing God. We saw how God’s ultimate purposes are to reveal Himself to Israel and then through Israel to reveal Himself to the world. The book of Genesis shows us God’s ultimate purposes, to fill the earth with His glory, but the book of the Exodus shows us how He will do it, by making Himself fully known.

And how timeless this need proves to be. Who is God? What is God? These are questions left unanswered in our culture today, and what answers are given are often highly personalized and highly rationalized. Humans make God in their own image expecting Him and wanting Him

to be what they need and what will fit nicely into the lives they've already made for themselves. Same thing is true in the church. Whether theologically liberal or orthodox, we're all prone and tempted to define God on our own terms, to create our little space for Him to fit into.

But God is not known from below. In other words, the knowledge of God does not begin with the human mind or human experience. This was the great error that the book of Ecclesiastes exposed for us. The idea of the autonomous man or woman who is able to figure God and the world out all on their own is an impossibility. Instead, God is known from above. He speaks; He reveals. We listen; we watch. And how our passage illustrates the reality to us today. Not only does God reveal Himself, but He reveals Himself as a particular kind of God. He reveals His character. He reveals Himself as Redeemer. Through the freeing of His people from slavery to Pharaoh we see that God is glorified by revealing Himself to His people and all the earth definitively as redeemer and deliverer.

1. God permits hardship in order to make Himself known 5:1-6:27

And so, just diving right in today, Exodus 5:2 is the shaping question of our entire passage. Moses confronts Pharaoh with God's demand, "'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival for me in the wilderness.' But Pharaoh responded, 'Who is the LORD that I should obey him by letting Israel go? I don't know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go,'" (Exodus 5:1-2). You see, just reading these black words on white pages may not really convey to us the emotion and the offense taken by Pharaoh regarding this request. But such a request like this, invoking the name of another god to the Pharaoh would have been a deeply contemptible affront.

This statement that another god wanted Pharaoh to do something was really a challenge to Pharaoh's authority, and a challenge to Pharaoh's authority was in essence a rejection of

Egyptian beliefs, worldview, and entire way of life. Thus, accordingly, Pharaoh is not interested in conceding anything, even though this request is rather minimal. Pharaoh, therefore, doesn't just reject Moses' request; we see that he responds by further oppressing the Israelites. Insecure and threatened he determines to further demonstrate his place as king.

You see, as we talked about last week, Pharaoh is more than just an ordinary human character or average earthly ruler. The book of Exodus presents him as an archetype of the ruler of this world. You remember how in chapter one Pharaoh is presented in a light rather reminiscent of the serpent of Genesis 3 and, therefore, is to be viewed as an agent battling against God's will who seeks to destroy God's creation. Pharaoh represents the ruler of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the ancient dragon and enemy of God and the people of God. And he is not happy to be told that his reign is not supreme.

Thus, he scoffs at the name of God and responds by only further oppressing God's people, hoping to further isolate them from God. Verse 9, we see that through this increased work load, Pharaoh's actions are taken with the goal of so occupying the Israelites with work that they will, "... not pay attention," to the name of the LORD.

And, at first, this seems to work. Verses 20-21, "When [the Israelite foremen] left Pharaoh, they confronted Moses and Aaron, who stood waiting to meet them. 'May the LORD take note of you and judge,' they said to them, 'because you have made us reek to Pharaoh and his officials—putting a sword in their hand to kill us!'" (Exodus 5:20-21), thus beginning a long tradition of the Israelites complaining. Right, I mean here we are at the very outset of our story and rather than deliverance, the people only suffer more in their bondage. Despite being sent to deliver the people, Moses and Aaron have seemingly made matters much worse, but God

responds. And we soon see why God permits this, in order to demonstrate to Egypt and Israel who He really is!

The central truth we are taught here, that will ring true not just for the exodus or not just for biblical times but for all times, is that God permits hardship in order to make Himself known.

So Moses went back to the LORD and asked, “Lord, why have you caused trouble for this people? And why did you ever send me? Ever since I went in to Pharaoh to speak in your name he has caused trouble for this people, and you haven’t rescued your people at all.” But the Lord replied to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: because of a strong hand he will let them go, and because of a strong hand he will drive them from his land,” (Exodus 5:22-6:1).

Just you wait. We see that God is first continuing to make Himself known to Moses, then second to Israel, and then through all of this, ultimately, making Himself known to Egypt and all the nations. You see verse 2 of chapter 6 provides us with the answer to Pharaoh’s initial question. Who is the LORD? “I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but I was not known to them by my name ‘the LORD,’” (Exodus 6:2-3).

You see, here’s the thing. God says that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In other words, He is the God who made His covenant with this people. But, now, God will reveal Himself in a deeper way that not even the patriarchs knew Him. Verse 2, suggests Israel will learn God (His name) in a way not known to the patriarchs, meaning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not understand all that the name of Yahweh really meant, which begs the question then of what will the name of the LORD now reveal about God that was otherwise unknown to the patriarchs. (Do you get what we’re asking here? Abraham and those guys knew God, but they did not know the depth of His character. And so, what is Israel about to learn about God that the patriarchs did not know?)

Well, it will be the truth that the LORD is Redeemer. Redemption will be what is revealed about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As Ross Blackburn writes, “[I]n the exodus from

Egypt Israel would come to know the Lord as ... One who brings out, Deliverer, Redeemer. Before all else, this is what it means for Yahweh to be the God of Israel,” (W. Ross Blackburn).¹ Brevard Childs adds, “To know God’s name is know his purpose for all mankind from beginning to end,” (Brevard Childs).² The hardships that Israel has experienced in the past and are currently enduring is the means through which God will make Himself known to them. In increasing their suffering and bondage, the LORD’s act of redemption will be all the greater. In rescuing them from the very depths of despair will God show not only His power but also His good character, His covenantal faithfulness.

But it will not just be to Israel that God makes Himself known, but also to Pharaoh, to Egypt, and to the rest of the world.³ You see, friends, that’s what the plagues are all about. That’s what we are to understand about the afflictions on Egypt to come. Ultimately, God will demonstrate who He is. Pharaoh asked, “Who is the LORD?” Well, just you wait.

2. God works all circumstances for His honor and glory 6:28-13:16

You see, there is obviously a great amount that could be said concerning the plagues that God sends into Egypt, and we’ll attempt to address some of that here, but whenever we get too bogged down in the details or in trying to discuss every detail of the plagues we run the risk of missing their message. In other words, my point is that “I am the LORD,” is the fundamental truth being taught in the plagues. That is God’s desire above all else. Not to punish, not to hurt or afflict, but to reveal Himself, to be known.

¹ Blackburn, *The God who Makes Himself Known*, 46.

² Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 119.

³ Stephen Dempster writes, “When Moses goes to Pharaoh to accomplish the deliverance in the divine name, Pharaoh asks him, ‘Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice?’ (Exod. 5:2). The rest of the narrative answers this question. Yahweh is the God of creation (Gen. 1), and this Yahweh Elohim is in covenant a particular people (Gen. 2),” (Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 97).

God reveals Himself to Moses so that Moses would know Him and worship and serve Him. He reveals Himself to Israel so that Israel would know Him and worship and serve Him. And He reveals Himself to Egypt so that Egypt would know Him and worship and serve Him. As Ross Blackburn points out, “The plagues not only serve as a means of judgment, but also as a means of mercy, that the Egyptians might come to know the Lord as God and in so doing find refuge from the judgment that was to come upon the whole land,” (W. Ross Blackburn).⁴

Desmond Alexander notes that even really the term “plague” is perhaps not the most accurate word to describe these ten events. You see, this word (נָגַף, *nagaph* – to strike, afflict) means more like an affliction or smite. Moreover, God Himself in chapter seven refers to these events as “signs and wonders,” (Exodus 7:3). The point being that God will strike at Egypt with these signs to demonstrate His power and make Himself known. Over and over again throughout this passage,

- (1) God directly states His intention to be known - 6:29; 7:5; 7:17; 8:10; 8:22; 9:14-16; 9:29; 10:1-22; 14:4; 14:13; 14:17-18; 14:30-31
- (2) God indirectly states His intention to be known - 6:6-7; 8:23; 9:4; 9:20-21; 9:26; 10:16-17; 11:3; 11:7; 12:36 14:25; 14:28
- (3) God states His intention to be known for future generations - 10:2; 12:42; 13:3; 13:8-9; 13:14; 13:16

God works all circumstances for His honor and glory. He is sovereignly in control. He will bring about redemption for Israel, and He will make Himself known to Egypt and all the nations. And God does this in two ways, first, in the plagues or signs themselves, and, second, in the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. You see, first, the signs themselves demonstrate God’s honor and glory. As many commentators have observed, these signs are really a battle of the gods: the true God against false ones, the seed against the serpent; the LORD against the Pharaoh. And so, we see God methodically dismantle and undermine the entire Egyptian religious system and

⁴ Blackburn, *The God who Makes Himself Known*, 50.

worldview. As Stephen Dempster writes, “The plagues are employed to show Pharaoh who really has dominion, the firstborn son of the Egyptian god, Pharaoh, or the firstborn son of God, Israel,” (Stephen Dempster).⁵

Beyond attacking elements of life tied to Egyptian deities, its noteworthy to even observe the geographic or spatial progression of the signs. The first three strike at the water and ground. The second three strike at living flesh. The third three signs affect the skies. Roberts and Wilson, thus, point out that, “If the ancient world were a three-story house – the earth, the waters beneath, and the heavens above – God brought destruction to each story and humiliated the deities that ‘governed’ each,” (Alastair Roberts & Andrew Wilson).⁶ Progressively, God works in heightened ways to make it clear that He alone is sovereign and in control.

And it’s this purpose in God that helps us understand why Pharaoh continually refused to relent or to change his mind and deny Israel freedom. Before the plagues and signs even begin, God says,

But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. Pharaoh will not listen to you, but I will put my hand into Egypt and bring the military divisions of my people the Israelites out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the Israelites from among them, (Exodus 7:3-5).

Now the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart has confused and challenged readers of the exodus for millennia. All sorts of questions pop into our heads as we read this. We might wonder, ‘Well how can God do this since we have free will?’ (despite the fact that Bible actually never states we do have free will). We might wonder, also, if God hardens Pharaoh’s heart does this somehow make God responsible or evil. Moreover, how does God work in the human heart at all. Really, this is a topic that very quickly takes on its own life and starts to dominate our study.

⁵ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 97.

⁶ Alastair Roberts & Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 42.

But it is an important question to answer, because, again, the point of all of this is to know God, and so His work in the human heart and His dealings with Pharaoh are a part of our understanding of His character and His power.

So just briefly, the Bible is clear from beginning to end that God sovereignly works within the human heart, but in different ways in reference to softening or hardening. In other words, He does both. As Michael Horton writes, God softens hearts by giving, “his redeemed a new heart (Jer. 31:32-33; Eze. 11:19), but in [hardening hearts] God gives the wicked over to their own desires,” (Michael Horton).⁷ In other words, God doesn’t make a person do evil, but he allows the sinful person to follow their sinful desires. Psalm 81,

So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts
to follow their own plans, (Psalm 81:12).

God allows the natural man to do what is natural to him. Theodore Beza put it like this, “God does not act in evil, but gives them up to Satan and their own lusts,” (Theodore Beza).⁸ John Calvin adds, “Did he harden it by not softening it? This is indeed true, but he did something more. He turned Pharaoh over to Satan to be confirmed in the obstinacy of his breast,” (John Calvin).⁹

Right, Pharaoh has already demonstrated his wicked nature. In chapter 5 we see various ways in which he is a malicious, spiteful, mean-spirited, obstinate, and implacably hateful man. And so, God gives this wicked man over to his wickedness and, in fact, uses it to make Himself known. Geerhardus Vos writes, “The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, while intended to make him a pronounced exponent of evil, had also the further intention of prolonging the process of

⁷ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 358.

⁸ Theodore Beza as quoted in Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1:517.

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics XX, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), II.IV.4.

deliverance, thus creating room for the fullest display of miraculous power,” (Geerhardus Vos).¹⁰ Simply put, God sovereignly and providentially uses even the most heinous and wicked of persons to still accomplish His ultimate purposes. As Augustine writes, “The fact that men sin is their own doing; that they by sinning do this or that comes from the power of God, who divides the darkness as he pleases,” (Augustine).¹¹

Now, at the same time, we have to understand that this line of questioning that we’re engaged in is really a peculiar and modern way of looking at these events. In other words, we’re asking questions that the book of Exodus has no interest in answering. Instead, as Duane Garrett puts it, “Exodus is primarily concerned to show that Israel’s release from captivity was entirely a work of God, and that the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart was part of this demonstration of YHWH’s power,” (Duane A. Garrett).¹² Simply put, the redemption of Israel isn’t because of Pharaoh’s generosity or Israel’s valiancy, but solely because the LORD is Redeemer.

3. God exposes our weakness that His power is made perfect 13:17-14:31

Now next week we’re going to come back to the tenth and final sign and plague, the death of the firstborn and the Passover. But for our purposes this morning, we’re focusing on how God demonstrates to Israel and to the nations that He, the LORD, is Redeemer. Thus, we have one more and final way in which He will demonstrate this. We see in chapters 13 and 14 that God exposes our weakness that His power is made perfect.

Verse 17, “When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them along the road to the land of the Philistines, even though it was nearby;” (Exodus 13:17). God directs his people as they leave Egypt, and we see it’s for two reasons. First, God knows that if they meet foreign

¹⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2015), 117.

¹¹ Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, NPNF 5, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), xvi. 33.

¹² Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2014), 373.

nations in their journeys and face opposition, they will shrink back and return to Egypt. In other words, again, Israel itself still does not truly know the LORD as Redeemer. So God will perform one more sign to show Israel their need for Him as well as His power and goodness to deliver.

But let's not forget that God also, though, desires to further reveal Himself to the nations. In other words, what comes next will be instructive not just for Israel, but for Egypt and the world as well, verses 3ff of chapter 14,

Then the Lord spoke to Moses: "Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you must camp in front of Baal-zephon, facing it by the sea. Pharaoh will say of the Israelites: They are wandering around the land in confusion; the wilderness has boxed them in. I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will pursue them. Then I will receive glory by means of Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." So the Israelites did this.

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about the people and said: "What have we done? We have released Israel from serving us," (Exodus 14:1-5).

God baits Pharaoh so that He may give one more demonstration of what it means that He is LORD.¹³ Pharaoh suddenly feels emboldened again and summons the most powerful army he can to bring Israel back into bondage. Think about picture we're given here. God delivers His people. He redeems them and saves them, but immediately the wicked serpent-prince comes after them to re-ensnare them, to bring them back into bondage. But all of this is under the LORD's control. This ruler can do whatever he wants; the LORD will prevail!

We read that God leads the people to the יַם סוּף (*yam-sūp*) – Red Sea; Sea of Reeds. Now all of our English Bibles translates this phrase as "the Red Sea," but many Hebrew scholars dispute this translation, however, arguing that the best translation would be "the Sea of Reeds." Really, it doesn't matter, because if it was indeed the Sea of Reeds rather than the Red Sea, this was still no small body of water. 1 Kings 9:26 tells us that King Solomon kept an entire fleet in

¹³ Desmond Alexander writes, "God gives Pharaoh the courage to fulfill his own wishes," (Alexander, *Exodus*, 67).

the Sea of Reeds, ok, so this isn't God parting Lions Lake. It is a surreal and inexplicable feat which the LORD is about to perform.

Pharaoh's army comes. The LORD opens the sea for the Israelites to walk through. God leads Pharaoh's army to pursue them into the parted sea and the LORD closes the waters in on them, "The water came back and covered the chariots and horsemen, plus the entire army of Pharaoh that had gone after them into the sea. Not even one of them survived. But the Israelites had walked through the sea on dry ground, with the waters like a wall to them on their right and their left," (Exodus 14:28-29). God exposes the helplessness of Israel in order to further make known that he, the LORD, is Redeemer.

Conclusion

Pharaoh asked, "Who is the LORD?" God answers, in these signs, that the LORD is Redeemer. Everything is meant to point to that central truth that this is who the God of all creation is, who the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is. Our God is a warrior, who fights to free us from bondage, to crush our enemy, and show Himself to the whole world. He is always pursuing His fame, the glory of His name. And as amazing and miraculous as the signs and wonders He performed in Egypt were, nothing would compare to the sign and revelation He would give when God became man, lived among us, offered Himself up on a cross, and rose victorious from the dead.

You see, again, while these are very real historical events, there is also a deeper spiritual meaning that you and I must grasp and be grasped by. Friends, the LORD is Redeemer! The LORD is your Redeemer! Look over to Ephesians 2. Paul describes first the bondage you were in,

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously lived according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly

desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also, (Ephesians 2:1-3).

So get this. You were dead. You were a slave. You were in bondage to the ruler of the power of the air. You were utterly lost and without hope. But here's the thing. Paul makes it clear that you and I weren't just some innocent victims crying out for salvation. No, we gladly lived in this condition. We preferred it. We wanted it. We didn't desire salvation. We loved the Pharaoh who slaved over us wanting no part of the LORD who could redeem us. So the LORD wasn't just redeeming us from some tangible enemy; no we were the enemy.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— not from works, so that no one can boast, (Ephesians 2:4-9).

The LORD has redeemed us from ourselves! When we were in bondage, but loved that bondage and wanted to continue being a slave, Jesus Christ overcame that all to redeem us from sin and death, to make us new and alive, to transfer us from the kingdom of this world to the Kingdom of God! We have been delivered! We have been saved! We have been redeemed! The LORD is Redeemer! Is He your Redeemer? And if you say yes, are you living like a slave to the old life, or are living like someone who has been set free, who has been redeemed? The LORD is Redeemer. Jesus is Redeemer.