

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES SO THE NEXT GENERATION WILL KNOW

Exodus 10:1-20

Please review this week's catechism question.

What new person did you meet in church this past Sunday?

INTRODUCTION

Tell a favorite story your parents told you about their life before you came along. Why are your parents' stories about their life important to you?

All parents tell their children stories of their past and all children enjoy hearing most of those stories. However, for the Christian parent, our stories are not to merely recount our experience. Rather, as we see in today's passage, God wants us to be telling our children the stories of his work in the world. When we tell our children the stories of our lives we are to fit our story into God's story. God's story is how he is working in the world to make his name great in the salvation of his people.

In vv. 1-2, God tells Moses that he hardens Pharaoh's heart so that he can multiply his miraculous signs against Egypt so that each Israelite parent can tell their children and grandchildren about how Yahweh dealt harshly with the Egyptians and performed all these miraculous signs so that all Israel, as defined by these three generations, might know the Lord. God's assumption in this passage is that there is a day coming when he will be done with Pharaoh and Israel will be free from their slavery. At that time they will be God's people in order to worship him. At that time all those who have witnessed these great miracles will need to tell those who are born after these events about them. The work of creating and saving God's people happens at a historical moment, through an historical process and then it is the task of that saved people to continue to recount the story of how God made us into a people to those who come after us. In today's study we will see that we are not only to recount the events through which God

makes his people but we are to explain to succeeding generations what those events mean.

STUDY

Exodus is Moses doing what the Lord commands in v. 2. He is recounting for succeeding generations how the Lord dealt harshly with the Egyptians so that the succeeding generations might know the Lord. As we have seen this story includes not only God's punishing Egypt but the suffering of Israel in slavery. It would not be hard to imagine a Jewish child in the future asking this question: Why did God permit Israel to live as slaves for so long? Why didn't he deliver them sooner? Why didn't he wipe out the Egyptians right away and free Israel immediately?

1. What are some possible answers that people could give to those questions?

One popular answer is: There is no "Lord." What happened to us was so cruel that I have not been able to believe that there is any 'God of the Hebrews.' The suffering we endured for hundreds of years and the cruelty I witnessed in the slave camp of Goshen convinced me that we are alone in the universe. I don't want you wasting your time praying to or thinking about some god, for none exists. A god of love and power would not permit such evil to exist in the world. Another popular explanation goes like this: "That's a good question son. I've thought long and hard about it. The conclusion I've come to is this. God didn't want us to suffer like that. However, he gave mankind a free will. He made us with the ability to either obey him or disobey him. He cannot interfere with our will because he wants us to love him freely, not because he has forced us to do so. He tells us that if we will obey him he will love us but that if we disobey he will destroy us. The choice is up to us. Every human has to decide for themselves whether they will obey God or not. Pharaoh was simply a stubborn and evil man and he did not want to obey God. God punished him for his disobedience and he finally forced him to let us go. However, God couldn't make it happen any sooner because he couldn't interfere with what Pharaoh wanted to do. God did all he could but he couldn't stop

Pharaoh from doing what he chose to do. Unfortunately, Pharaoh's disobedience to God also led him to persecute us.

2. What answer would God give to those questions based on vv. 1-2?

Son we are part of a much larger story than just our own. The God who created the heavens and the earth amazingly chose Abraham and us, his descendants, to be his people. His purpose has been to reveal himself, to make his glory known to us and to the whole universe through us. His purpose has been to bless all the nations of the world through his saving us. In his infinite wisdom and love, the accomplishment of this purpose included our being made into slaves by Pharaoh for over 250 years. In order that we might know the greatness of his power, love, justice and mercy, he hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he might be able to perform the ten miraculous signs in Egypt. He endured Pharaoh's rebellion and then treated the Egyptians so harshly to reveal his hatred of sin and his power over sinners and his love for us. We, as his people, discovered that we are ruled over and saved by the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We know that as his people that everything that happens to us is happening for our eternal joy. He rescued us from our slavery in the way that most clearly enables us to know him. He is the God of all the heavens and the earth who is able to do anything he pleases to do. We are his people by his choice and so we worship him alone as our Savior. Son, to know God and to belong to his people is the best thing that can ever happen to us or to any human being. You can rejoice that God has chosen to reveal himself to you in saving us in this way from Egypt. This joy can never be taken from you.

3. What difference would these various answers make in the life of the child who asked?

If there is no God then what is the purpose of their existence? Why should this son live as a Jew? Why should he not do whatever he wants to do and pay no attention to any of the values and lifestyle choices that his father and his family embrace? If there is no God, what possible reason can be given for pursuing any particular course of action? OR—If the God they are worshipping has no control over people and this God has promised to bring them into the land of

Canaan and drive out all the other nations: What confidence can this son have that they are not going to be wiped out or enslaved by another, more powerful nation? If God could not protect them from Egypt and the suffering of slavery there, why should he expect that God will be able to keep any of his promises? Again, why should he bother to worship or pay attention to this God? OR—If God is the one who willed the suffering then there is no need to fear. He cannot be harmed. He can take risks of faith. No matter what happens in the world, God is in control of it all. God rules over all things, including the evil choices of evil men, so that his glory is revealed in the salvation of his people. The God who has pledged himself to Israel, to the church, is the Lord of heaven and earth and is working out all things in conformity with the purposes of his will. All of his promises will be fulfilled in the manner that maximizes his glory and our joy.

God wants succeeding generations to know him. Therefore, he wants us to tell them about his sovereignty.

4. What tension exists between v. 1 and v. 3?

The fact that Moses wrote vv. 1-2 and followed them immediately with v. 3 is a shock to human logic. In v. 1 the Lord says that he has hardened Pharaoh's heart. He didn't permit Pharaoh to have a hard heart. He hardened his heart. Yet, in v. 3 the Lord, who hardened his heart, asks Pharaoh, "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?" Here's how my human head wants to answer that question. "Pharaoh will stop refusing to humble himself before you Lord when you stop hardening his heart." In other words, from a human point of view it is impossible to reconcile v. 1 and v. 3. How can God condemn Pharaoh for not humbling himself when he just told Moses that the reason Pharaoh continues to have a hard heart and thus refuses to humble himself is because the Lord hardened his heart?

5. Upon what basis do we know that even though God hardens Pharaoh's heart, yet Pharaoh wills and does evil and is therefore guilty?

The way we know that Pharaoh is guilty of refusing to humble himself even though God hardens his heart so he will not humble himself is

because that's what the Bible says. Regardless of what human logic would say, the Bible says that Pharaoh is guilty of loving, willing and doing evil and is therefore justly condemned by God and punished.

6. What are some ways that the sinfulness of Pharaoh is shown in this passage?

Pharaoh is case study number one of how rebellious humans naturally feel about God and his commands. We find in Pharaoh the way every human naturally, apart from God's grace, responds to God. He has suffered through the worst hailstorm that ever came upon Egypt and he knows the God of the Hebrews sent it. He asked to be forgiven by this God and to have the hail stop, God mercifully stopped the hail, and he knew Yahweh stopped it. Yet, he hardened his heart and refused to let Israel go. Now he again refuses to obey God and invites Moses to send upon his nation a plague of locusts. That is until his advisors ask him what in the world he is doing. Then he calls Moses and Aaron back and tells them that they can go worship the Lord their God. However, before he lets them go he asks a cunning question. He asks, "Just who will be going?" When Moses informs him that the entire nation, all ages and genders and all their flocks will be going, he explodes in mockery and fierce contempt. "Yeah right. You say that the Lord is with you, well he's going to have to prove it this time if you think I'm going to let all of you and all your possessions go into the desert to worship. I know that you are plotting evil against us. You don't really want to worship the Lord. You're just using your religion as a cover, as an excuse in order to harm us. My guess is that you are going to make an alliance with our enemies and then attack us. You're no different from us. You would love to dominate us and make us slaves to pay us back, so forget it. Either the men go by themselves and the women and children stay here under my control or nobody goes. Now get these shepherders out of my sight."

When Pharaoh witnesses the devastating force of the locusts he quickly calls for Moses and Aaron and he humbles himself before the Lord. He declares that he has sinned against the Lord and against Moses and Aaron. He recognizes that the locusts are God's just judgment against his sin and he pleads with Moses to ask the Lord to forgive his sins and remove the locusts. However, as he did with the

hail, Moses prays for Pharaoh and the Lord sends a west wind that carries every single locust into the Red Sea, where they all die.

Just like after the hail, Pharaoh does not let the Israelites go. This time, however, we are told that rather than the cause being that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, that the Lord hardened his heart. Regardless of who does the hardening, the fact remains that Pharaoh ought to obey God and he does not and therefore he is guilty. He is guilty, once again of the grossest form of hypocrisy. He uses all the right words. He professes all the right truth. He looks and sounds like a truly repentant man but he is not. He does not fear or trust the Lord. He is only terrified of the locusts. Once that which he fears is removed, he has no interest in loving God or people. He shows the perverseness of human hearts.

7. Can you relate to Pharaoh? What are some ways you have ignored God's warnings and his kindness? Have you ever pretended to do right out of fear of people? Have you ever accused others of being hypocrites and judged their motives? When have you begged for help when you were in trouble, only to forget about God once the distress is removed?

God wants succeeding generations to know him. Therefore, he wants us to tell them about our sinfulness.

8. Does Pharaoh deserve to have the locusts sent upon him and his country? Why or why not?

God never does to Pharaoh or Egypt anything greater than what they deserve. Pharaoh has rebelled against God his whole life long. It is perfectly just for God to harden his heart. Pharaoh has done nothing that would obligate God to change his heart. He delights to love creation and to worship false gods. In spite of God's revealing his power and his grace, he continues to have no interest in obeying God. He insults God at every turn and mocks his power. He acts as though he is in control of all things and refuses to humble himself before the God who has created and sustains all things. He accuses God's people of plotting evil against him when he is the only plotting evil. Is

there any reason that can be given for why God should not destroy Pharaoh and Egypt who have so cruelly abused Israel and defied him?

9. All of these “plagues” point to the final judgment that God will bring upon the head of all the wicked when he sends them into eternal conscious suffering in hell (See the use of the plagues in Rev. 5-9.) Does that seem to be a fit (just) punishment for human sin to you? Why or why not?

God is perfectly just. He does not play favorites. He takes note of every motive of every heart. He alone judges according to perfect standards of righteousness. Every human being is going to have to answer to him and he will judge every human being perfectly according to what we have done. When we see Moses leave Pharaoh's presence and lift his hand to bring judgment upon Egypt we are to understand that is exactly what we deserve as well. What argument can any human being offer to God as to why God should not kill us and send us into eternal flames? How would it be unjust for me to suffer forever in hell? Our sin against the Lord is as great as that of Pharaoh or of the worst sinner we can imagine. Read Romans 1:18-32 & 3:9-18 to see the extent of our sinfulness.

God wants succeeding generations to know him. Therefore, he wants us to tell them about his justice.

10. How do vv. 1-2 and v. 9 exhibit the massive grace of God?

What shines out of this tale of sin and judgment is the grace of God towards Israel. It is the underlying current of wonder in the entire story. Israel has been shown to be sinful along with the rest of humanity and yet in vv. 1-2 we are told that God's ultimate purpose in doing what he is doing is so that these sinful people will know him. This entire story presumes that there is a day coming when Israel will be free from her slavery and will be living as God's people in the land of Canaan. God is moving all of creation to serve the welfare of his people, the nation Israel. They do not deserve this kindness. They have done nothing to distinguish themselves from the Egyptians. In fact, later in the OT we are told that they were worshipping the gods of the Egyptians the entire time that the Lord was working these miracles

to gain their release. God is loving Israel freely and completely not because they are lovable but because he has chosen to love them.

11. How is the grace of God shown in Pharaoh's prayer and Moses' response to his prayer in vv. 16-19?

We are again reminded by Pharaoh's prayer in vv. 16-17 and then by Moses' prayer on his behalf of the way that God has graciously saves his people. Pharaoh knows that Moses has the right and authority to ask God to take away the locusts. He believes that God will listen to the prayers of his appointed prophet, not because of who he is but because of who Moses is. This reminds us that God has sent another prophet, just like Moses, who not only proclaims God's word to us but who prays for us so that God will take away his curse against us not because of who we are but because of who he is. We see in Moses a portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ, who by his death, resurrection and present intercession gains for us the love of the Father. God loves us for the sake of Jesus, because of what he has done, not because of what we have done.

12. How does the fact that God saves sinful Israel while destroying sinful Egypt strike you?

God wants succeeding generations to know him. Therefore, he wants us to tell them about his grace.

13. What are some ways you are telling these succeeding generations the story of how God makes a people for himself through the work of Christ? Are you including all the meaning of the story that God wants you to tell, i.e., his sovereignty, our sinfulness, his justice and his grace?