

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES THOUGH MEN ARE DECEIVED

Exodus 7:8-24

Please review this week's catechism question.

Have you met any new people after Sunday morning worship the past two weeks?

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several weeks as we've been studying the story of God's delivering Israel out of their slavery in Egypt we have seen that his ultimate goal is not saving Israel. He is using the process of saving Israel to accomplish his ultimate purpose. He has stated his ultimate purpose in 6:7, that Israel would know that he is Yahweh, in 7:5, that the Egyptians would know that he is the only true and living God and now again in 7:17, that Pharaoh will know that he is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. This is the ultimate reason God does all that he does: to make known, to reveal the greatness, the glory of his own name. He is out to display the splendor of his majesty throughout the entire universe and he is saving Israel from slavery to do so.

As you look at the world does it appear to you that the Triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, is doing a good job of making himself known in the world? Why or why not?

If you and I were really honest we would have to admit that we frequently think that God is not doing a very good job of taking care of his world or his people. In fact, if you just look at the world, from one point of view it appears that God is doing a really bad job of making himself known. The majority of people in the world do not know the great, triune Creator of the universe. The majority of people do not know that he came into the world in the person of Jesus. Evil appears to be winning on all sides. Good Christians suffer while those who live in perversity enjoy all the pleasures this world has to offer. Deception is rampant. People believe the craziest things about God and the nature of the world we live in. Ungodliness and perversity are

extolled as virtues while godliness and moral purity are slandered as great evils.

This passage is a perfect example of how it appears as if God is doing a bad job of making himself known. Nothing that God does in this passage appears to work. God says he wants his people to go but nothing he does in this passage accomplishes his will. Yet, twice in this passage we are told that everything is going according to plan (vv. 13 & 22, "just as the Lord said"). God tells us, through this story, that the way he makes himself known in the world, by saving his people includes many unexpected things.

STUDY

1. In vv. 8-9 what does God tell Moses & Aaron is going to happen when they go talk to Pharaoh and what are they supposed to do about it? Does any of this surprise you? (See Matthew 16:1-4)

He tells them that Pharaoh is going to demand that they prove that God has appeared to them by performing a sign. What is shocking is that God tells Moses and Aaron that they are to comply with the pagan, hardhearted king's request. He tells them that Aaron should throw the shepherd's staff of Moses and it will turn into a snake. What would happen if President Bush commanded Secretary of State Colin Powell to do something and Secretary Powell responded by saying, "Prove you're smarter and stronger than me by doing something I can't do and then I'll think about doing what you say? Do a thousand push ups in 10 minutes and then I'll call the ambassador to China." He would be immediately fired. Those under authority do not have the right to demand that their superiors prove they have the authority to give a command. How much more is this the case when it is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe commanding a lowly worm of a man to obey? According to Romans 13, this Pharaoh not only exists as a human being by the will of God but he is king of Egypt by the will of God. You would expect God to respond here the way Jesus responded when the religious teachers demanded a sign from him. "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah."

2. Have you or anyone you've known demanded that God prove himself before you or they would trust and obey him? Why do we do this?

3. According to Psalm 145:13-16, Acts 14:16-17, 17:25 and Rom. 1:20, how is God responding to human demands to be cared for and shown that he exists?

The fact is that every moment of every day God is revealing his supernatural power in and through creation. Every moment God is giving every belligerent human in the world overwhelming evidence of his power and grace in giving breath and sight and food and sunshine. Every human knows they did not create themselves and they do not decide to go on living and they do not decide to keep the rain falling. Yet, every human being demands these things as their right. We complain when we don't get the good things of life in the measure we believe we deserve them. After all, we deserve a break today. Astonishingly, God graciously keeps giving into the demand of sinful humans to prove his grace and power. He does it so that everyone will know he is God.

God's plan to make himself known by saving his people amazingly includes giving into rebellious human demands.

4. When Pharaoh asks for a sign, what is the implicit agreement he is making if God gives the sign?

This is the language of negotiation. The implicit agreement is that if God does what he asks, he will do what God asks.

5. How does Pharaoh respond to God's graciously giving him the sign he demands in vv. 10-13?

He seeks to obliterate what is blazing in front of his face because he does not want to know God. What he wants is to enjoy the fruit of Israel's labor and avoid the retribution of the enslaved people. He loves error, not truth, so he calls for deceivers. He already knows what is true, he knows how to be happy, and so he seeks to cover over the evidence that proves he is wrong. He invites those who are

accounted wise and spiritual and who have authority in spiritual matters in his culture to come and do the same thing. He looks for an expert to explain away the miracle. He doesn't like the implications of what has just happened and so he looks for a way to justify his ignoring God. He does it by inviting his magicians to come and when they come each of them throw down their staffs and they also become snakes.

6. How does God make a "counter-argument" to show his power?

Aaron's "staff" swallows all the "staffs" of the magicians. God makes plain that while these men have the power to duplicate a staff becoming a snake, it is his power that is ultimate. The struggle between God and Satan, between God and rebellious man is not the struggle between beings coequal in power. God is alone and supreme in his sovereign power and nothing can thwart him.

7. God knew in advance that Pharaoh would ask for sign, therefore he knew in advance that Pharaoh's magicians would duplicate his sign. Why did God tell Moses and Aaron to perform a sign that he knew the magicians could duplicate? If you were God and trying to convince Pharaoh that Moses was your prophet would you give a sign that could be duplicated?

What we see here again is that God's primary goal isn't to convince Pharaoh to listen, it is to make himself known in the world and God thinks this is the best way to do it, contrary to what we would naturally think. God is showing off his glory all the time but he does it in ways that men can easily duplicate or explain away. It takes far more than a miracle to persuade a sinner that God exists. It takes much more than a display of divine power to convince a sinner that the only way to be happy is to depend upon God alone to be happy. Humans don't want to trust and obey God and are always looking for ways to get out of our obligation. God has placed all kinds of ways for us to deceive ourselves close to hand. There is a ready explanation for why I don't need to change, to not do what God tells me to do, all around me. The famous pastor and reformer, John Calvin, says in his commentary about Pharaoh's calling for the magicians, "This severe and terrible

vengeance upon Pharaoh ought to inspire us with terror, lest, in our hatred of truth, we should seek after deception.”

8. Paul describes this human inclination in 2 Timothy 4:3-4. How should we respond to what Pharaoh does here and what Paul describes as human nature in 2 Timothy?

We must be very careful. God is intentionally revealing his grace and power in ways that are easy for fallen humans to explain away. It was no trouble for Pharaoh and his wise men to come up with evidence that justified their ignoring God’s word. They were motivated, not out of a desire to know the truth but out of a desire to deny what they didn’t like. We are all naturally like this. We are looking for ways to excuse our unbelief and disobedience. When you read the Bible or listen to a sermon and you disagree with something you see or hear because of what it might require of you, don’t automatically look for a way to explain it away. When the evidence of God’s grace and his truth don’t seem sufficient to you, be careful that you don’t seek to be deceived. God has placed many opportunities for deception in the world and he is under no obligation to keep sinners from deceiving themselves. We must plead with God for mercy to keep us from seeking deception. We must honestly and humbly seek the truth for ourselves and talk with others in order to ascertain if this is a revelation from God or am I turning aside to myths and away from the truth.

God’s plan to make himself known by saving his people amazingly includes giving people over to deception.

9. What is shocking about vv. 15-16 in light of vv. 13-14?

It’s like God is saying to Moses, “The plan is working perfectly. You did what I said and Pharaoh did exactly what I told you he would do. He is completely resistant to my commands and refuses to do what I’m telling him to do. Now, because he refuses to listen, I want you to go to him early in the morning and give him another message.” Isn’t this odd? God tells his servant that he wants him to keep preaching and performing his miracles to a man whom he knows is going to refuse to listen.

10. How is what Jesus says to his disciples and to us in Matthew 10:16-25 & John 15:26-16:3 the same as what Yahweh tells Moses here?

He sends us into the world and what we discover is that the world hates us because it hates Christ. The world is hard to the gospel and does not want to listen. Yet we are commanded to keep telling the world God’s word. We are to continue presenting the truth of the gospel and showing the glory of God in Christ even though the world is hostile to Christ and continually looking for ways to discount the gospel and harm us. God is working to make himself known in the world and his work includes us persistently proclaiming the gospel to hardhearted and deceived people.

11. Moses and Aaron do exactly what God tells them to do (vv. 20-21). Are they successful in their ministry to Pharaoh (vv. 22-24)? What should we learn from this about what is “successful” ministry?

In vv. 20-21 we see that Moses and Aaron say exactly what God tells them to say and they do exactly what God tells them to do. They are 100% faithful. However, they are complete failures—if success is defined as Pharaoh listening to them and obeying what they say. However, if success is being faithful, then they are successful. Every pastor, every parent, every Christian, every church must be so very careful to define “successful” ministry the way God defines it. The fact that your children do not trust Christ or that no one responds to your teaching or that your church is not growing does not necessarily mean that you are not being successful. The response of people to what we do and say is not a sure sign that we are or are not doing God’s will. The question is simply this: am I doing what God has told me to do and saying what God wants me to say? We are not in charge of what happens. God’s plan to make himself known includes our faithfully living out the gospel and teaching the gospel and having no one respond to the gospel. It’s not wrong to want others to trust in Christ and to grow in holiness but whether a person responds or not is not the determinative factor in whether or not I’m doing God’s will.

12. How does the “failure” of Moses and Aaron make you feel?

God's plan to make himself known by saving his people amazingly includes requiring his people to confront a deceived world with His word.

13. What are the differences between Moses and Aaron's turning water to blood and the magicians' turning water to blood?

Their duplication was not on the same level as what Moses and Aaron did. Moses and Aaron turned all the water in Egypt, which all came from the Nile river, into blood. Every fish in the river at that moment died. All the water was so foul in all the land of Egypt that it could not be drunk. This condition lasted for seven days. When we are told in v. 22 that the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts we know that what they did was not as extensive because whatever amount of water remained as water was not very great. They did not turn all the water in Egypt to blood and kill all the fish for seven days. What they did was turn some small quantity of water that they obtained from somewhere, into blood.

14. What does Pharaoh's being unimpressed with the difference between what his magician's did and what Moses and Aaron did tell us about the nature of human beings and our unbelief?

We don't believe in Yahweh because of evidence but because we don't want to believe. It takes hardly anything to convince us that we can safely ignore the God of the Bible. Such is the love of humans for sin and their hatred for God that it takes very little to convince them not to believe the truth. Our unbelief is not due to careful reasoning but due to what we love. Sin is irrational. Humans would rather believe anything than believe that there is a God to whom they are accountable and who requires them to undergo a radical reorientation of their loves, their beliefs and their behaviors to please him.

15. What do Pharaoh and his people do for the seven days it takes for the water in the Nile river to turn back to pure water?

He goes to his own house and does not concern himself with the nasty water. For seven days he ignores the foul stench and undrinkable water. He has servants to dig his wells and he has wine to drink and he has business to attend to. He is insulated from the effects of the plague and so he pays no attention to it but pays attention to the affairs of his own house and job. The

people of Egypt, however, cannot avoid the fact there is no water to drink. They must dig wells for water, something they never had to do in their lives. So they are consumed with survival. Like Pharaoh, they live in sight of the bloody water, the stench of it is in their nostrils but rather than take to heart what is going on they consume themselves with survival. Both the rich and the poor ignore the facts surrounding them out of concern for living on earth.

16. How is their response the model for how all humans respond to God's revealing of himself in the world? (See Luke 14:15-20 for another example.)

This is the condition of men upon the earth. We are so taken up with the affairs of our lives that we are oblivious to the overwhelming evidence that surrounds us. Our eyes see, our nostrils are full, yet we are preoccupied with the pleasures of life or our jobs or just surviving and so we don't see, we don't smell. God is out to make himself known and he has given overwhelming evidence of his glory in creation and in the church. What we see in Pharaoh and his people is what is natural to us. Do you remember the parable Jesus told of the wedding banquet (Luke 14:15-24)? The king is having a wedding banquet for his son and he invites all the people of his kingdom to come. One after the other they all turn down the invitation. What are their excuses? One is getting married, another has just bought a piece of property, and another just bought a new yoke of oxen. In other words, the things that prevent them from seeing the glory of the invitation to the wedding of the king's son are not perverted living but the simple pleasures and pursuits of life. More people are going to be in hell because they loved a nice lawn than because they loved alcohol. More people are blind to the glory of God in the gospel because of a love for shopping than because of a love for stealing. More people deny the power of Christ because they have to work two jobs than because they have two wives. The people in this story are human beings, just like us. Their blindness is our blindness.

17. What are you doing to make sure you do not miss the glory of God blazing in creation and in the gospel and so miss out on his salvation?

God's plan to make himself known by saving his people amazingly includes giving people over to worldly concerns.