

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES WHILE TOLERATING HYPOCRISY (FOR NOW)

Exodus 8:1-19

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wanted to get to know another person but the other person was not interested in letting you get to know him or her? What was that like?

Have you ever had another person presume something to be true about you that was not true? What was that like?

We have repeatedly seen in the story of God's delivering Israel out of their slavery in Egypt that God's ultimate goal is to make himself, in his full glory, known (Exodus 3:15, 6:7, 7:5, 17 & 8:10). He is eager to reveal himself to us and is doing so through this record of his delivering Israel. We must come to this passage, as we come to the Bible as a whole, not to get our prejudices and preconceptions about God confirmed but to allow him to tell us what he is like. As with any other person we do not get to tell him what he is like but must allow him to tell us what he is like. In this passage we discover how God patiently deals with hypocritical, disobedient people.

STUDY

1. What is God's will for Pharaoh according to v. 1?

"Let my people go, that they may serve me." This is God's will for Pharaoh. What Pharaoh must do to obey God is not hard to figure out. God wants him to release Israel from their cruel bondage as slaves and to let them leave his country as a free people.

2. Pharaoh is the king of Egypt by God's decree (Romans 13:1-2). It is his job to make the laws in Egypt. What implications can we draw

about government and civil law from the fact that God is telling the king what to do?

Kings make laws, yet God tells kings what they ought to do. What is ultimately moral, right, good, and just is not open to discussion and is not man made. God, as our Creator and the Sustainer of all things is the only one who has the right to tell us what is just. Human laws are only good laws in as much as they line up with God's law.

3. In addition to revealing to Pharaoh his will, what else does God reveal to Pharaoh in vv. 2-4?

He makes the consequence of refusing to obey known. Like every impartial lawgiver, God warns Pharaoh of the consequences of disobeying his just laws. He tells him that if he disobeys his command to release Israel, then God will cause the Nile to teem with frogs. The frogs will come up on the entire land of Egypt. There will be frogs everywhere, even in the most intimate and private of places. Frogs will be in their beds and in their ovens and in their cooking utensils.

4. Why does God threaten Pharaoh with an overabundance of frogs as the punishment due to him for not obeying his command to let Israel go?

➤ What is the role of the Nile River in Egypt? *God is again going to bring punishment upon Egypt from the primary source of Egypt's strength. Egypt's power as a nation comes from the Nile River. Just as making the water of the Nile river undrinkable by turning it to blood, showed his power over the source of Egypt's greatness, so his causing the Nile to produce an over abundance of frogs shows his power over it. The fertility of Egypt is due to the fertility of the Nile and by causing the Nile to become overly fertile he demonstrates that he has been the source of the Nile River's fertility all the time. He is able to make the Nile serve the needs of the Egyptians or he can use it to afflict them. He holds their life in his hands.*

➤ What ought to happen to Pharaoh for enslaving an entire nation for personal profit? *God is being gracious. He is displaying his*

power and his justice through a plague that is not ultimately destructive, but simply annoying. He warns of the impending doom that will come upon Egypt if they don't repent gently and progressively. Pharaoh is sinning against God and deserves the ultimate punishment, hell. Yet, God sends something far less than he deserves in order to warn him.

- How is this plague an extreme expression of the daily, “normal” reality referred to in Genesis 3:16-19 & Romans 8:18-23? *God uses his creation to punish men for their sins. The malfunctioning of creation is a sign of God's displeasure with human sin. There is a day coming, when Christ returns, when creation will never cause harm to us. God will make a new heavens and a new earth. Until that day, God uses this faulty creation as his chastisement upon humanity's sin.*

5. How has God revealed to you his laws and the just consequences of disobeying his laws? How have you experienced “creation run amok” as God's displaying his power, grace and justice to you?

God, in order to make himself known, deals patiently with sinners by revealing his will and the consequences of disobeying his will.

6. What happens when Pharaoh refuses to let Israel go (vv. 5-7)?

While it isn't reported in the text, Pharaoh dismisses Moses' warning and so Moses commands Aaron to stretch out his hand with the staff in it over the waters of Egypt. Aaron does so and immediately the waters swarm with frogs and they come out of the water and cover the entire land of Egypt. You can't walk without stepping on them. You pull back the covers to get into bed and there are frogs in your bed. You go to the outhouse to use the bathroom and there are frogs in your seat. You get out the dishes to prepare supper and there are frogs in the bowls. There are slimy, croaking frogs everywhere. And the magicians add to the misery by using their secret arts to cause more frogs to come up on the land of Egypt.

7. According to v. 8, how does Pharaoh respond to the frogs and to the magicians making more frogs by their secret arts?

The ability of the magicians to manufacture more frogs does not affect Pharaoh in the same way that their turning water to blood had on him. He doesn't see their ability to make more frogs as disproving the power of Moses. God enables him to see the deception of the magicians. We aren't told how many days of frogs Pharaoh puts up with but eventually the frogs get on his nerves. It appears that he comes to his senses. The pagan king who has insolently said he doesn't know Yahweh, calls in Moses and says this, “Pray to Yahweh for me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord.” Finally, Pharaoh recognizes that Yahweh is the true God. He acknowledges that the frogs are Yahweh's judgment upon he and his people and that he is obligated to obey Yahweh by letting Israel go to serve the Lord.

8. What does Pharaoh's request reveal about his view of God and of himself? How should he have made his request if he truly “got it”?

He approaches God as if he and God are equals. He has something God wants—Israel and God has something he wants—the power to get rid of the frogs. He attempts to barter with God. He admits that only Yahweh can get rid of the frogs but he also reveals about himself that he is not in love with Yahweh but with getting rid of the frogs. He wants his help to escape a problem. He is not interested in obeying a command. If he were truly repentant and sincere he would have come to Moses with a written emancipation proclamation in hand and with having set in motion the release of Israel. If he “got it” he would not be requiring God to act first, rather he would act first and cry out for undeserved mercy. However, Pharaoh comes to manipulate God into doing what he wants.

9. Verse 9 literally says, “Moses said to Pharaoh, ‘Glorify yourself over me. When shall I pray for you and your servants and your people in order to take away the frogs from you and your houses...?’” What is Moses saying in light of Exodus 7:1? What are the ways that Moses' action here exemplifies the work of Christ on behalf of sinners?

In 7:1 God told Moses that he was going to make him God over Pharaoh. So when Moses says, “glorify yourself over me” he was saying that he, as God, was going to take the place of the servant while Pharaoh, the servant, took the place of master. He, who is God to Pharaoh, willingly laid aside his rights as God and by his intercession served Pharaoh, his enemy. Moses cries out to the Lord on behalf of Pharaoh, asking Yahweh to remove the just curse of frogs from Pharaoh, even while Pharaoh continues to cruelly oppress the people of Israel. Moses asks God to be kind to Pharaoh for his, Moses’ sake and for the sake of his people. Neither Moses nor the Lord requires Pharaoh to act first. Rather, without any action on Pharaoh’s part, with a simple request, Moses intercedes and God removes the frogs. Here is Jesus praying for his enemies, “Father forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing.” Here is Jesus interceding before the father right now on behalf of every Christian, asking the Father, for his sake, to overlook our sins and to help us in our need. Here is the gospel of God’s grace as Paul says in Romans 3, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

10. Moses says that God’s answering his prayer and removing the frogs will enable Pharaoh to know there is no other God but Yahweh. How does God’s answering this prayer show there is no other God?

In all of the plagues, including this one, God reveals that he is the ruler over all creation. His creating the frogs and killing the frogs shows he is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. The magicians can make frogs but not destroy them and so God reveals that alone is God by doing both.

11. What does this prayer and God’s answer show about the nature of God and our relationship to him?

First, we discover that God delights to show mercy. He is eager to display his kindness to people. God displays his grace by submitting to and serving sinners who merely use him to get what they want. We should never think of God as being tight-fisted and unwilling to forgive or to be gracious to people. He delights in showing off his benevolence. Second, he loves to respond to the prayers of his people

on behalf of others. As far as we know, the Lord never told Moses, “If Pharaoh says he’ll let the people go, then I’ll get rid of the frogs.” Moses knows it is his place, as God’s prophet to not only speak to Pharaoh about God but to speak to God about Pharaoh. He is absolutely confident that God will listen to him because of the promises God has made. Third, we learn that we cannot be certain of where we stand with God by how the circumstances of our life are going. It is possible to come to God for the wrong reason and have God graciously give you what you are asking for. However, your receiving the deliverance from your misery may not be an evidence of saving grace. It could be that God is simply permitting you to live in your deceived state and he is not going to trouble you. We must examine our motives for coming to Christ. Are we coming because we believe that knowing Jesus and living in fellowship with him forever is the best thing that could happen to us? Or are we coming to him because we want a better marriage, a healthier body, a more fulfilling life or just to escape hell? Finally, we discover that human treachery and unbelief cannot thwart God’s purposes. Hypocrites can’t fool God. Pharaoh doesn’t have the last word. Notice again at the end of v. 15 that when Pharaoh reneges on his promise and hardens his heart, everything is still going according to plan. It is all happening just as the Lord said it would happen. God has reasons for answering the prayers of unbelieving, hypocritical people.

12. What are some ways you have experienced God’s kindness to you in spite of wrong motives and/or ongoing sin in your life?

God, in order to make himself known, deals patiently with sinners by relieving the deserved distress of sinners.

13. How does God get rid of the frogs? Why does he do it like this?

He killed the frogs right where they were. There were so many dead frogs lying around that they piled them up in heaps. In the original, it says there were bushels of bushels of dead frogs piled into these heaps. Then, we are told that the entire land of Egypt reeked of the stench of dying frogs. While Pharaoh hardens his heart and refuses to listen he does so in sight and smell of the dead frogs. He resists God with the stench of death in his nostrils. God’s power, grace and justice are

being displayed in these dead frogs in a way that is impossible to miss. There is an ongoing warning in the stench that pervades the land for many days. God's word and God's work continues to have its effect, while Pharaoh breaks his word.

14. How does God respond to Pharaoh's breaking his promise?

Without any warning given to Pharaoh, Moses commands Aaron to strike the dust of the land. When he does gnats spring up from the ground and cover all the people and cattle of Egypt. These gnats are some form of parasitic insect. They may have been mosquitoes or ticks or lice or blood sucking gnats. We're not sure exactly what they were except that they were parasitic on warm-blooded animals, including humans.

15. The magicians are unable to duplicate the gnats and tell Pharaoh that the gnats are definitely the finger of God. How does Pharaoh respond to the gnats and this "testimony" of the magicians?

Pharaoh is unmoved by this admission by the spiritual experts in his kingdom and he continues to hold Israel in captivity and to scorn God's command. God convincingly demonstrates that he is not only Lord over the river but he is also Lord over the land. Just as he can command water to produce frogs, so can he command dirt to produce gnats. As Calvin says, "...all creatures are ready at God's lightest command, whenever he chooses to make use of them to chastise his enemies..." Pharaoh does not ask for mercy in this case and none is given. In other words, the plague of gnats continues in Egypt at least until Israel leaves.

16. What does Pharaoh's refusal to release Israel in the face of all this evidence tell us about why people refuse to trust in and obey Christ?

Again, we see that God has placed reminders in Egypt that he is still at work. He is not done yet with them. He is in charge of what is happening, not Pharaoh. He may think that he is in control because the frogs are gone and Israel is still in captivity but God has, through the stinking frogs, the plague of gnats and the admission of the magicians given overwhelming evidence that he is in charge and will

not be thwarted. We see in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in spite of the confession of his magicians that the reason he resists is not because of reason but because of what his heart loves. Thus it is with sinners who refuse to believe what is blazing before their eyes. Men love sin and therefore cannot love God even though God displays his glory before them in such unmistakable ways. Though people give reasons for not obeying God, the reason they don't obey is not because of lack of evidence but because they love evil and hate good. People are not unbelieving because it makes more sense to not believe than to believe. People resist God and his salvation because they love the "salvation" they have constructed for themselves and not the salvation that God offers. Our trouble isn't lack of information but lack of love for God and his ways. Our hearts are perverse. We love sin and disobedience to God and we hate God and obedience and thus we disobey because we can't obey someone we hate.

17. What are some ways that you or someone you know has persisted in sinning even though the sin simply increases the misery?

God, in order to make himself known, deals patiently with sinners by reminding sinners of who is in charge.