

Morning Sermon April 11, 2021

“The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart” – Exodus 4:21 & 14:4

In the Book of Exodus, nine times we are told God hardened or would harden Pharaoh’s heart: Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10, 14:4 and 14:8!

One more time, we are told God would harden the hearts of the Egyptians – Exodus 14:17! (Most likely including Pharaoh)

Three times we are told Pharaoh hardened his own heart – Exodus 8:15; 8:32, and 9:34

Six other times we are told that Pharaoh’s heart was hard or grew hard – Exodus 7:13, 7:14, 7:22, 8:19; 9:17, and 9:35

I. *God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, why?*

1. *God hardens Pharaoh’s heart because He can, because He is God and Pharaoh is a creature and God has a right to do what He wants with what He has made –*

¹⁸ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. Romans 9:18 (NKJV)

²¹ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? Romans 9:21 (NKJV)

- A. *People will yell, “this is unfair!” People often rail against God!*

¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” Romans 8:19

- B. *But God is God and you and I are not God –*

²⁰ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?”

²¹ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? Romans 9:20-21

2. *God hardens Pharaoh’s heart, and all the hearts He hardens, in righteous judgment and righteous wrath –*

²² What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? Romans 9:22-24

- A. *If you look at the list of Bible verses, I gave in my introduction about God hardening Pharaoh’s heart, and compare it to Pharaoh hardening his own heart, the list SEEMS to indicate two things: (1) God hardened Pharaoh’s heart first Exodus 4:21 and (2) God hardened Pharaoh’s heart MORE, 9 or 10 times to 3!*

- B. *Yet, what those verses do not show is Pharaoh’s heart, and all hearts for that matter, were hard from the start, as born in sin, hardness of heart is our natural state as sinners –*

Our hearts are so bad, that our salvation requires spiritual heart surgery, a radical change, we sin on our own; but God causes us to walk in His statutes -

²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. Ezekiel 36:26-27

Hearts of stone vs. flesh what is the difference?

- *One hard, one soft!*
- *One cold and lifeless, the other warm and full of life!*
- *A stony heart does not FEEL pain, nor does a hard heart feel qualms of conscious! The heart made of flesh, FEELS Pain!*
- *Our situation pre-Christ is that our hearts are so bad we cannot change ourselves –*

²³ Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? *Then* may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil. Jeremiah 13:23 (NKJV)

C. *God hardens hearts that were already hard because of sin* – “Scripture asserts that the reprobate are delivered up to depraved lusts; but is it because the Lord depraves or corrupts their hearts? By no means; for their hearts are subjected to depraved lusts because they are already corrupt and vicious. But since God blinds or hardens, is he not the author or minister of evil? Nay, but in this manner He punishes sins, and renders a just reward to the ungodly, who have refused to be ruled by his Spirit. (Rom. 1:26.) It hence follows that the origin of sin is not in God, and no blame can be imputed to Him as though He took pleasure in evils. (Gen. 6:6.)” John Calvin

It was probably Pharaoh’s father or grandfather we read about in Exodus 1, who did not know Joseph and treated Israel dreadfully. We read that first Pharaoh (King of Egypt) died – Exodus 2:23, and yet the next Pharaoh is not better, consider his haughty attitude –

² **And Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.” Exodus 5:2**

3. *God hardens hearts that are already hard, for His own honor and glory* –

⁴ **Then I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I *am* the LORD.” And they did so. Exodus 14:4 (NKJV)**

¹⁷ **And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Exodus 14:17 (NKJV)**

... He has triumphed gloriously! ... Exodus 15:1

Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness, ... Exodus 15:11

¹⁷ **For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” Romans 9:17 (NKJV)**

Read Exodus 15:1-13; Romans 3:23

Seeking glory and honor, wrong for us but right for God!

II. *God’s hardening of hearts is always a fearful judgment and one we should avoid like the plague(s)*



Waters Turn to Blood
Exodus 7:14-25



Amphibians (Frogs)
Exodus 7:26-8:11



Gnats (Lice)
Exodus 8:12-15



Flies
Exodus 8:16-28



Disease on Livestock
Exodus 9:1-7

The Ten Plagues of Egypt



Unhealable Boils
Exodus 9:8-12



Hail and Fire
Exodus 9:13-35



Locusts
Exodus 10:1-20



Darkness
Exodus 10:21-29



Death of First-Born
Exodus 11:1-12:36

As bad as plagues might be, a hard heart is worse than them all!

1. *One of the important things to notice is Pharaoh is not against the hardening* –

¹⁵ **But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the LORD had said. Exodus 8:15 (NKJV)**

²⁸ **So Pharaoh said, “I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Intercede for me.” ²⁹ Then Moses said, “Indeed I am going out from you, and I will entreat the LORD, that the swarms of *flies* may depart tomorrow from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people. But let Pharaoh not deal deceitfully anymore in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” ³⁰ So Moses went out from Pharaoh and entreated the LORD. ³¹ And the LORD did according to the word of Moses; He removed the swarms of *flies* from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people. Not one remained. ³² But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also; neither would he let the people go. Exodus 8:28-32**

³³ So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and spread out his hands to the LORD; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain was not poured on the earth. ³⁴ And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants. ³⁵ So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the LORD had spoken by Moses. Exodus 9:33-35

I say this because some wrongly interpret God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart as some dreadful thing by which an evil God forced poor innocent Pharaoh to sin (and harden his heart) against his will!

However, the verses tell us Pharaoh hardened his own heart; showing us Pharaoh was happy to be hardened! People who sin typically are tempted by the pleasures of sin – Hebrews 11:25. Pharaoh's pleasure was probably in POWER, he felt he had.

2. *Plagues, seem to temporarily soften Pharaoh's heart, but relief from them hardens him again, plagues, hardship, are meant to bring people to their knees in prayer, but some people are made worse by the very thing that makes others better –*

⁸ Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. ⁹ And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory. Revelation 16:8-9

3. *The same sunshine and rain that makes fruit and flowers grow, makes manure stink! A person can be hardened by God's trials or His smiles, hardening is God's letting us go our own sinful way, yet the same trials make God's true people Christ-like –*

A. *All God must do, to harden the wicked, is to let them go their own way -*

²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; Romans 1:28 (NKJV)

B. *However, God's people are not hardened by God's trials or smiles, rather they are made more Christ-like, ... -*

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed* to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:28–29 (NKJV)

4. *The writer of Hebrews warns his readers about hard hearts –*

⁸ Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, Hebrews 3:8

Question: What is the rebellion? What is the rebellion in the wilderness?

Answer: It is a rebellion of Israelites, the same people God had redeemed from Egypt, the same brought out of the clutches of Pharaoh by God's mighty power are hardened in "unbelief" themselves -

¹² Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; ¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called "*Today*," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:12-13 See also Hebrews 3:15 & 4:7

A. *The Israelites in the wilderness were seemingly saved, and privileged, and yet still they fell, this is a lesson for us -*

¹⁰ Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. ⁵ But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. ⁷ And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "*The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*" ⁸ Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; ⁹ nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; ¹⁰ nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 1 Corinthians 10:1-11

B. *The Israelites got so bad they even complained about being saved from slavery in Egypt –*

³ And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, “Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” Exodus 17:3

⁵ We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; ⁶ but now our whole being is dried up; *there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!*” Numbers 11:5–6 (NKJV)

They wished they were back under Pharaoh, are they happy now with him in Hell?

III. *How can we avoid hardening?*

1. *Our lesson from the example of Pharaoh is – Never think you can fight with God and win! Romans 8:31 –*

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31 (NKJV) *The opposite is true, if God be against, who could be for us?*

¹² “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. ¹³ These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.” Revelation 17:12-14

2. *Our lesson from the example of the Israelites is to take heed lest we fall -*

¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 1 Corinthians 10:1-12

A. *Never think you are right with God, or okay, while you are sinning!*

God is very gracious, but ...

²⁰ ... But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, Romans 5:20

6 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Romans 6:1-2

B. *The purpose of grace is to help us overcome sin, not to safely enjoy it, know the portion of sinners is God’s wrath –*

¹² Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts. Zechariah 7:12

C. *If we do sin, we need to confess it, and forsake it immediately –*

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

3. *Remember hardening can happen quickly, we should be daily in our efforts to avoid this hardening –*

¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, ¹⁵ while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” Hebrews 3:13–15 (NKJV)

A. *This is a true friend thing –*

⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. Proverbs 27:6 (NKJV)

²⁴ A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24

B. *This is an anti-procrastination thing “daily” I “today” - 2 times.*

C. *This is a life or death / eternal life / eternal death thing - ... rebellion.” Hebrews 3:15*

²³ For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.” 1 Samuel 15:23 (NKJV)

King Saul, and Judas were similar, both had important positions (king and apostle) and power from the Spirit, but they were not saved!

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