Exodus 7-10

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0:00] Well, there's a story, there are three boys who are in the school playground, do you remember these days? And they're bragging about their dads, and they're engaging in a discussion, my dad is bigger than your dad, my dad is greater than your dad.

One said, my dad scribbles a few words and calls it a song and they paid £50. The second pipe is like, well yeah, my dad scribbles a few words and he calls it a poem and they paid him £100. That's nothing said the third kid. My dad scribbles a few words and calls it a sermon and it takes six people to collect all the money in the room. Now as we come to chapter 7 to 10, there's something of a my God is better than your God about these chapters.
It's a discussion that's going on between Moses and Pharaoh. My God is bigger than your God. But it's more than bragging rights. What we've seen over recent weeks of you being here is that Moses has been commissioned by God to go to speak to Pharaoh.
But he's not going to be reluctant to say, isn't he? He doesn't want to go. He's demonstrating a great deal of hesitation. And he's uncertain about this commission that God has given him.
[1:14] And then God speaks directly to him, doesn't he? God meets with him. God tells him, you've got to go and address Pharaoh. You are to tell him to let the Israelites leave Egypt so that they will worship me.

And eventually, Moses agrees. And he goes with a fair degree of boldness, such as in confidence. Because he now thinks that God is going to make everything work smoothly.
From start to finish. However, do you know what we saw last week? That wasn't the case at all, was it? Moses and Aaron essentially command Pharaoh, the leader of the world, to let God's people go. Chapter 5, verse 2, is Pharaoh's response. But Pharaoh said, who is the Lord? That I should obey his voice and let Israel go. I do not know the Lord. Moreover, I will not let the people go.
And God's response is to tell Moses, to say to Pharaoh, You want to know who the Lord is, Pharaoh? You want to know who the Lord is? Well, just watch. And what follows is these plagues, which are so famous, isn't it?
[2:21] Which we read, the first and the last of the nine that God sends before that ultimate plague, which we'll look at next time. These plagues, we need to understand them.

We need to understand that they are not just naked demonstrations of power on God's part. They're not just part of a, my God is bigger than your God argument. They are responses to Pharaoh's question.
Who is the Lord? Pharaoh fancies himself as a bit of a God himself. Who is part of a society. That the gods in every nook and cranny in Egypt was full of gods.
So that throughout the plagues, God intends to show Pharaoh who the Lord is. Such that Pharaoh should obey him. And in the process, I would suggest that God is showing us who he is.
And that we should be moved to a place of love and respect and fear. Such that we would trust him. And we would obey him. And we would follow him.
[3:25] So who is the Lord that you should obey? Three things. The first answer is this. We're going to look at it. And perhaps the most fundamental answer that God gives to Pharaoh. Where he says, I am the unique Lord. I am the unique Lord of all the earth.

So look at chapter 7 and verse 17. Chapter 7 and verse 17. The first plague, the plague of blood. And God says to me, by this.
By this you shall know that I am the Lord. And then if you just click over to chapter 9 and verse 14. He says this. For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself and on your servants and your people.

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So that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. I am the unique Lord. I am the unique judge of all the earth. So why is God setting the record straight here?
It's because Pharaoh not only saw himself as a God. Like most people in his day. But like many people in our day. Pharaoh was a religious pluralist.
[4:32] Really. That is, Pharaoh believed in many gods. His statement, who is this God? I think we can often think it's a statement of atheism. But it's not.

He was saying, I don't believe this God exists. He wasn't saying, I don't believe this God exists. Rather he's saying there, well you've got your God. And I've got my God. What's the problem? Stop bugging me. And so Pharaoh would feel, I think, pretty much at home in Ealing, West London in 2015. Where for many, the belief that no God of any religion can have any superiority over others.
Well that's the normal view, isn't it? Different religions. Different gods. Well it adds to the spice of life. Isn't that a good thing? Why are you people so worked up about it?
What is the big deal? You've got your belief, I've got my belief. Just don't take it too seriously. Listen to how David Wells puts it in his book, No Place for Truth. While religious pluralism may be a novel experience for us, it is putting us in touch with the world that surrounded the biblical authors.
[5:47] The pluralism and the paganism of our time were the common experience of the apostles and prophets. In Mesopotamia there were thousands of gods and goddesses, many of which were known to the Israelites, indeed sometimes known too well.

Nothing, therefore, could be more remarkable to hear the contention, even from those who are within the church, than the existence of religious pluralism makes belief in the uniqueness of Christianity quite impossible.
Had this been the necessary consequence of encountering a multitude of other religions, Moses, Isaiah, Jesus and Paul would have given up biblical faith long before it became fashionable to do so.
Exodus 7-10 is literally back to the future for us. When we are back in the kind of world. Kids, you go to school in the kind of world that Moses was dealing with here.
You go to work in the kind of environment that Moses was living in. So to Pharaoh's years, Moses and Aaron's claim of one God, the unique and exclusive God to him is close-minded, intolerant, bizarre.
[7:03] And so without getting ahead of ourselves too much for commentators, read that many of the plagues were direct assaults on those parts of nature that were considered by the Egyptians to be gods.

So for example, Egyptians worshipped the Nile. And personifying it as the god Happy, not H-A-P-P-Y, H-A-P-I, who is the god of the Nile.
There was the goddess of childbirth, Haka, who was said to him at the head of a frog. There's Hathor, the mother and sky goddess, depicting as a cow.
The plague of darkness is a direct assault on the Egyptian solar god of the sun, Ray. And so Egypt has got all these gods.
And Egypt is really very, very comfortable with all these gods. And Yahweh comes to Pharaoh and says, Pharaoh, you've got it all wrong. I am the unique lord.
[8:08] I am the only god of all the earth. There is no god other than me. And so many people today, and so many of our friends and neighbours and our colleagues, they struggle with that.

And maybe you're here this morning and you struggle with it yourself. You might be tempted to side with Pharaoh on this one. So you think of the Egyptian gods, happy and H-A-P-Y and Hathor. Well, they're not really your thing.
But you are not willing to say that the god of the Bible, the Christian god, who took on human flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the only way to eternal life. As far as you're aware, no religion can claim the fullness of spiritual truth.
Therefore, all religions, in essence, can be valid. That's the air that we breathe. So I don't know if you've heard it, sometimes it's explained by the analogy of a blind man and the elephant.
Do you know that illustration of that story? And the illustration goes like this, isn't there? There is a blind man and he feels the tail of the elephant and he reports, well, elephants must be thin and flexible.

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[9:19] And then another blind man, he touches the leg of the elephant and he claims, well, this elephant is as thick as a tree. And another other blind man touches his side and he says, well, actually, elephants are like a wall.

And the analogy is supposed to illustrate, isn't it, that various religions, they understand one part of God, but nobody sees the whole picture. And to see the full picture, we need all the world religions together.
But to claim that you have the one true understanding of God, that is intolerant. That is arrogant. But if you think about that illustration for a minute, you realise that it only makes any sense at all if you are the person who's got the view of the whole elephant.
That you are the one who can see the tail and the legs and the sides. So the minute that you see that all religions seem to be part of the truth, you've actually kind of given yourself, haven't you, this gift of omniscience.
You know that. You are the one who knows, who claims the very knowledge to be able to see everything. It's very, very arrogant. And nobody else can see it.
[10:40] You look closely at all the major different religions around the world, whether they're the major religions or the minor ones, and you quickly discover that they can't be all-valued, can they? They cannot be all-valued.

For a very simple reason, they contradict each other. They contradict each other, not even at the fringes, but they contradict each other at the very core. So they may all be wrong.
We can be wrong. But they cannot be right. They cannot all be right. So your job and my job is to continually look at the evidence. To see which one of them backs up the claims they make.
Which one of them makes sense. Which of them has got the kind of historical backing and so on.
And that is really what God is doing here with the claims. To Pharaoh, God is going to give them more evidence than he knows what to do with.
Evidence that Pharaoh will choose to ignore, but evidence that he's intending to show Pharaoh that God is a unique Lord of all the earth. That there is no one like him. And that there is no one besides him.
[11:49] But what is really interesting here is that this unique Lord of all the earth shows himself to be secondly what we would call the natural Lord. The natural Lord.

And what I mean by that is it was God's purpose, if it was God's purpose just to show Pharaoh that he's bigger and better and stronger and more powerful than anybody else, he could have done it, couldn't he, in a more effective way actually.
So if Hollywood was writing the script into this, they probably would have had Pharaoh strut into Pharaoh's palace and just turned Pharaoh's servants into donkeys or frogs or fire just like that.
And Moses would have turned to Pharaoh, done his best kind of Arnold Schwarzenegger impression and said, ask them a visa baby. It just wipes them out. And everybody would have known, don't mess with the God of Israel.
But God doesn't do that, does he? And the reason he doesn't do that is because the plagues are here to make a point. Now the chances if you've ever read a liberal comedy on Exodus, which you probably don't, but if you've seen one of those kind of documentaries that's on the Discovery Channel or something like that or something on the plagues, you will have heard this, that the plagues can be explained naturally rather than supernaturally or miraculously.
[13:14] It was just a natural phenomenon. And they will say that everything that happened in the plagues had a scientific and non-supernatural explanation. However, as you read the text, as you read this passage, I'd suggest to you that the passage doesn't, the Bible doesn't actually allow us the luxury of just seeing these things as a natural phenomenon.

Let me give you four reasons, four brief reasons why the plagues are supernatural and miraculous.
Number one, there's an intensification that's now going on. It's intense. What's the first thing?
So while frogs and insects and plagues and cattle and hail and darkness, they're all known in Egypt, there's an intensification here. Beyond any ordinary expected occurrence, even beyond anything that Egypt would have ever experienced before.
It's intense. That's the first thing. Secondly, prediction. Prediction is number two. The time is precisely set for many in the plagues, isn't it? When they are going to occur down to the day, Moses says.

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And when they are going to stop in some cases. So, intensification and then prediction. Thirdly, discrimination. We're told that there's a little area of Egypt called Goshen where God's people were living, where there would be no plagues of flies or death to cattle and hail.
[14:39] But God was going to protect that little geographical area. And then number four is moral purpose. The plagues weren't freaks of nature, but rather they carried a moral purpose of discrediting the gods of Egypt.

They revealed to Pharaoh what is the identity of the true God. So with every plague and every step, God is overseeing and God is supervising and God is controlling the whole thing.
But having said all that, what is really fascinating is that the sovereign God does seem to have worked through some kind of natural progression in the plague.
There is a flow in the plague, it makes sense I don't know when you've seen it, from a scientific purpose perspective. So it says that the Nile changed to blood.
The whole river changed to blood. So the whole ecosystem of the river is destroyed, isn't it? And as a consequence, the frogs jump out of the river.
[15:44] And they get everywhere. And when I say everywhere, they get everywhere, don't they? Let's try to imagine it for a moment. We're normally a little bit queasy, aren't we, about frogs, but you've got frogs in your bed, you've got frogs between the sheets, you've got frogs in your cupboards, you've got frogs in the fridge, you've got frogs in the oven, you lift up the pot and there's a frog in there, and then you go to the toilet and there's a frog in there, you've got to wash your hands and the frogs are there, and then the frogs die.

And so you've got rotting carcasses all over everywhere. You get into bed and there's rotting frogs in there. And what does that bring? Well, the fourth place, the third and fourth place, and that's some flies.
And if the frogs weren't bad enough, now the Egyptians have got bugs in their hair, they've got bugs down their necks, bugs up their noses, in their mouths, in their eyes, in their ears, biting, whining, drinking them dry.
And you think, if I deliver amongst that amount of bugs, and that amount of gnats, you'd have had to put me away somewhere. And that might be great, but wherever they put you away, there'd be gnats and bugs.
It's not going to save me at all. So all the gnats and the flies bring on the place of five and six. Because place five and six are basically academics.
[17:18] Livestock dying and skin disease, and so on. And so the question is, as you read it, as you see that, why would God have maintained this natural progression in the plagues?

Why is this kind of a natural explanation, as well as wanting to demonstrate that he is sovereignly controlling everything occurred? And I think the reason for it is this. God intends the plagues of Exodus 7-10 to be an undoing of Genesis 1-2.
We're not going to take the time to go through that now, you can do it on your own, but sprinkled throughout this section, from chapter 7-10, are words that point you back clearly to the first two chapters of the Bible.
And the point of the repetition of these words is that these plagues are a reversal of creation. That in the plagues, nature is breaking down.
It is disintegrating. It is reverting back to its pre-creation chaos. So in Genesis 1-2, you've got God creating the world. There's this perfect cohesion between everything.
[18:30] Every part of creation not only exists, but it co-exists. It's like a beautiful, perfect orchestra, Genesis 1-2. Every part is complementing each other.

And through the plagues, God undoes that. So the river is changed. I mean, it disrupts the ecosystem. And the animals bring disease. The gnats and the insects bring disease to the animals. And the weather destroys the animals, and so on, and so on, and so on. So in the end, we are brought back to the beginning. We are brought back to the chaos. And the darkness that is mentioned right at the start of Genesis 1.
What is the point of all that? I would suggest that that is saying to you, my laws, God says, are not have hazard. God is saying, my laws are not arbitrary, but to disobey me is to unleash forces of chaos and disorder in your life and everything around you.
To disobey me is to unleash in the natural order forces of chaos and disorder in your life and in everything around you. The plagues show us in a graphic way that when we disobey God, we are

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not just breaking God's law, we are actually violating the very fabric of our own being and the very fabric of our creation so that chaos and disorder result.
[20:01] Think about it this way. Give us your doctor. You've been very ill and your doctor he or she gives you some clear instruction. They say you ought to take the medicine and this is what you are not to do.

When you get those instructions from the doctor who of us would say do you know what doctor I just think actually you're on a bit of a power trip aren't you? You're an egomaniac.
You're a control freak. I don't want to do it. You're telling me what to do and what not to do but doctor I'm not going to do it. I don't want to do it so I will not do it.
Now if you're wise you're not going to speak to a doctor like that are you? Because we know that the instructions given to us by our doctor are for our benefit. They reflect to us the nature of who we are as physical beings.
We know that if we violate those doctor's instructions we end up violating ourselves. We hurt ourselves. And that is what it's like with a doctor. So transfer those instructions to the God of the Bible whose position to you is on another scale.
[21:12] He's not just your doctor. He's your maker. And he made you and he created you and he made us. He created us. He created his laws to reflect the very fabric of who we are.

Of who we are emotionally and spiritually and psychologically and physically and everything about us. And you violate God's laws. You violate yourself. And you unleash forces of chaos into your life. And you say who is the Lord that we should obey him? He is the natural Lord such that chaos will fall on you when you disobey him. And in a sense that is totally natural.
I don't think it's hard to see the reality of your life and in my life. But God has designed each one of us such that order comes from having God at the centre of our lives.
Where God is the most important person. God is the most important part of our lives. He's to be more important than your job. He's to be more important than our families.
[22:16] God is to be more important than money. God is to be more important than everything. And if you violate that there are consequences. There is ensuing chaos. You put your work at the centre of your life and you will invariably overwork.

With the likelihood that there will be some form of family disintegration. Or emotional even physical disintegration and disorder in your life. Because that is not the way you were meant to live. And when pride and self-righteousness sit at the centre of our lives instead of God, we find it very hard to apologise, don't we?
And to forgive. Because we always want to be right. And that leads to what? It leads to bitterness and resentment and chaos. And when we move to another level, the same thing applies socially.
If money, in the end, is more important to us than God, God, well then we'll never be as generous as we should be to charities, to missions, to ministry, as we should be.
And that ripple effect will eventually cause greater hunger and greater deprivation in the world. And so the natural order of the plagues is showing to us that when we disobey God, we unleash forces of chaos and disorder in our lives and beyond our lives.
[23:34] who is the Lord that we should obey? And he is the unique Lord of all the earth and he is the natural Lord. But if we leave it there, I think we miss the central reason why the God of the Bible is the Lord of the universe, the unique Lord.

Because the third thing that the plagues show is that he is the saving Lord. And as you read through this whole section, which I hope you will, I hope you have already, you see that the plagues were not just a means of judgment, but they were a means of salvation as well.
They were actually sent to save, weren't they? Now it is obvious God is set out to save the Israelites, but he is even out to save some of the Egyptians. I don't know whether you saw that.
It's easy to miss that in the Herald Plague, chapter 9, verse 20. We're told, aren't we, that in chapter 9, verse 20, some of Pharaoh's officials actually turned to the Lord.
They turned to the Lord. Through the plagues he wants to save people. And through the plagues he wants to indirectly save you and me as well.
[24:47] So look at what God says to Pharaoh through Moses in chapter 9, verse 16. He says, but for this purpose I have raised you up to show you my power so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

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God's purpose in all that he's doing in Exodus is that his name might be proclaimed throughout the whole world to all people. So the plagues are part of the story of history.
They're part of the story of history which will be read by millions upon millions upon millions of people. A story that will eventually come down by God's providence to be told to a group of people in Drayton Mather High School on 25th October 2015.
So that you and I will hear of the unique and the natural and the saving Lord of all the earth and be moved to obey. So here is what is unique about this God.
He is the saving God who saves by suffering the plagues himself for you and me. one of the questions you come to when you try to interpret the Bible is are the plagues picked up anywhere else in the New Testament?
[26:00] So one good principle for interpreting the Bible is can you find somewhere in the New Testament that looks back at it? That's going to really help you as you seem to apply it to your life. Well the plagues do reappear.

They reappear in Revelation chapter 8. In Revelation chapter 8 the trumpets have blown and you have hail and you have fire and you have creatures dying and you have blood and you have darkness.
Which is very very practical isn't it? The plagues are a picture of the same judgment of some judgment that lies ahead. But stuck between the plagues of Exodus and the plagues of Revelation is another plague.
Because in Matthew chapter 27 we read that as Jesus hung on the cross from the 6th hour to the 9th hour, darkness came over all the land. It was allowed.
In essence it was the plague of God falling on his own son. But on the cross Jesus became the enemy of God.
[27:06] Whereby he took all the plagues of God's judgment upon himself. The decreation, chaos, falls on Jesus, darkness, blood, and so on.

And he begins to disintegrate like creation was disintegrating. And that is why the God of the mind is absolutely unique. Because in his son, in his son, we see the judge of the world who is judged. So that you and I can escape judgment. And we see in his son the mark of the universe unmade so that we might be remade.
And we see the creator who is decreated. So that you and I can become new creations. While might the sun in darkness hide and shut his glories in when God the mighty maker died for man the creature is sin.
Jesus took the plagues so that we might not need take them because he is the saving Lord. And this passage comes with a final health warning doesn't it?
[28:19] The final health warning we sang from Psalm 95 just before the sermon it is this do not harden your heart like Pharaoh. One of the tricky things when you read this chapter when you read these chapters from Exodus 10 to 10 is that sometimes we're told God hardened Pharaoh's heart and other times we're told Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

And so we don't like that do we? We want to know which is it? Which one is it? And the Bible says it's both. It is both.
It doesn't tell us how but throughout the Bible it is clear that God orchestrates everything for his purposes and at the same time he does that without violating freedom of the individual world.
And so like you and I like Pharaoh you and I are held accountable for what we know. And God will hold you accountable for what you've heard today.
And the wrong thing and the foolish thing and the dangerous thing and the eternally damning thing would be to harden our hearts that we would fail to obey him.
[29:36] You see we're just like Uncle! Do you know what Uncle Andrew is? Let me finish with this. Uncle Andrew appears in The Magician's Nephew in one of the Chronicles of Narnia.

I missed it until this week. And when Narnia is created when Aslan who is the Christ figure represents Jesus he sings creation into being.
And the creation song reveals Aslan's majesty and glory. In a sense it is a grand call to worship like we have at Stavon's service.
But there is one person called Uncle Andrew. And Uncle Andrew refuses to hear it. And the consequences are staggering. Listen to what Lewis writes. It is a remarkable piece of writing.

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When the great moment came and the beast spoke, Uncle Andrew missed the whole point for a rather interesting reason. When the lion had first begun singing long ago, while it was still quite dark, he had realised that the noise was a song.
[30:45] And he had disliked the song very much. It made him think and feel things he did not want to think and feel. Then when the sun rose and he saw that the singer was a lion, only a lion, as he said to himself, he tried his hardest to make himself believe that it wasn't singing, and never had been singing, only roaring as any lion would do in a zoo or in our own world.

Of course, it can't really have been singing, he thought. I must have imagined it. I'd be letting my nerves get out of order. Whoever heard of a lion singing, and the longer and more beautifully the lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring.
Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are, is that you very often succeed, and Uncle Andrew did. He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan's song.
Soon he couldn't have heard anything else, even if he had wanted to. And when at last the lion spoke and said, Narnia, awake, he didn't hear any words.
He heard only a smile, and when the beast spoke in answer, he heard only barkings, growlings, bayings, and howlings.
[32:18] Who is the Lord that you should obey him? He is the unique Lord of all the universe. He is the natural Lord, and he is the saving Lord.

So turn to him and obey him. And today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart.
Let's pray. Jesus Father, how powerful you are, and how majestic you are, and how judging you are, and yet you are the God who has done all this to save us.
And we praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that you have sent your Son to suffer the plague of judgment in our place. Lord, if we will only trust you.
And so heavenly Father, we ask you, we plead with you, we cry unto you, soften our hearts, Lord. Soften our hard hearts. Soften our hearts that we would hear you speak, and that we would live in accord with what you have instructed us to do.
[33:38] And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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