

## **“YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD” – EXODUS 7:14-24**

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**<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. <sup>15</sup> Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the river. Confront him on the bank of the Nile, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. <sup>16</sup> Then say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness. But until now you have not listened. <sup>17</sup> This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. <sup>18</sup> The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.’” <sup>19</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs—and they will turn to blood.’ Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone.” <sup>20</sup> Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. <sup>21</sup> The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt. <sup>22</sup> But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh’s heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said. <sup>23</sup> Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart. <sup>24</sup> And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.**



This is the day the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Have you ever received one of those gifts which made you just go, “Ehhhhhhh?” Maybe it was the gift of socks for Christmas, when all you really wanted were toys. Maybe it was that savings bond for your birthday and you wondered, “What in the world am I going to do with this?” Maybe it was two tickets to the Superbowl, but you had to politely inform your friend that you didn’t follow hockey. I’m sure with each of those gifts, the person wanted nothing more than to make you happy, but it didn’t quite seem that way.

God works like that also. No, he doesn’t just give us gifts that will make us happy, he doesn’t just give us obscure gifts that we wonder what in the world was he thinking. He gives us gifts to reveal a little bit about himself. That’s what the word “Epiphany,” means revealing. And in the few weeks following Christmas, the season of Epiphany reveals more and more about God, and specifically his Son Jesus. Some of the ways he reveals himself make it very clear who he is and that he loves us – take the wedding feast at Cana that Jesus was invited to. He provided the couple with a lovely wedding present of wine after all the wine had run out. But in our first lesson for this morning, it might be a little bit more difficult to get what God is revealing. In fact, it almost seems like God is doing something that doesn’t make a whole lot of sense – like socks you might get for Christmas.

But when God, through Moses turns the waters of the Nile River into blood, he is doing it more than to just show his power. He is doing it to reveal his love. He is doing it so that by this **YOU WILL KNOW I AM THE LORD.**

1. With lots of blood and

2. Despite hardened hearts

(1)

This story begins in the land of Egypt, where the people of Israel have lived for the last four centuries. They had originally come there to avoid a famine, and had just remained there. But when they grew to be a large people group, the Pharaoh of the land subjected all the Israelites into slavery. And now, God was going to act to deliver his people from their bondage, and he was going to use a man named Moses. Moses himself was an Israelite, but he was special, he grew up in Pharaoh's household, at least until he killed a man and fled. It was in his years away from Egypt that God called to him from a burning bush to go and free his people. And so Moses returned.

But this was not going to be a quick in-and-out kind of a mission. Pharaoh wasn't going to give up his vast labor force without a fight, especially from a single man like Moses. But God warned Moses of this, he warned him that **"Pharaoh's heart is unyielding."** But through Moses, God would make an example of Pharaoh, through Moses everyone would know that the LORD is God. And God could not have hit the Egyptians in a more sensitive spot than the Nile River – changing it from a river of life to a river of death. The Nile, as you may recall from Geography class, was the river which flowed through Egypt, it was the life-source for the Egyptians. If it wasn't for the Nile, the entire country of Egypt would be a desert wasteland. Since the Nile was this important to the Egyptians, it's no wonder they worshiped it as a god. In fact, they worshiped many gods who were related to the Nile.

And so Pharaoh was likely not going down to the Nile to do some fishing or water sports, but he was going down to the Nile in the morning for his church, so that he might appease the gods of the Nile. It was there that God told Moses to go, to show Pharaoh where true power lies, so that Pharaoh might **KNOW GOD IS THE LORD.** While Pharaoh was down by the river praying to his gods, Moses called out to him and said, **"Let my people go! Until now you have not listened, this is what the LORD says, 'By this YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD...I will strike the water of the Nile and it will be changed into blood."**

If Moses didn't have Pharaoh's attention before, he certainly did now, as he dipped the head of his staff into the Nile River. And a crimson liquid began to spread from that spot to the point where Pharaoh was. Even the basins not connected to the River turned the crimson hue – this was no natural phenomenon, nor even just the typical red algae that floated in the river from time to time. Almost immediately there was a bubbling throughout the river as the fish which were in the Nile floated to the surface with their best impression of "play dead." And the stench which followed, Pharaoh could barely stand it. It was the stench of death stemming from the once sacred Nile.

Now from this miracle, which we call the first of the ten plagues that struck Egypt, we certainly are able to see God's power. Pharaoh certainly should have **KNOWN THE LORD IS GOD.** But even in the

midst of all of this destruction, we also see the Lord's love, where God is tugging at Pharaoh's heartstrings to see the error of his ways and come to repentance. When all of Egypt was filled with lots of blood, Pharaoh should have seen the love of the LORD. And yet he didn't.

I think you and I can relate. It's very easy when things are going well in our lives, when there are little to no problems that are going on, it's easy to see God as a kind and loving God who loves us so much he showers us with these blessings. It's more difficult to see God working through the troubling times in our lives, the times when things aren't going so well. When everything in our world seems to be falling apart. God shows his love through our troubles. Instead of seeing this as an indictment upon us, we make it an indictment upon God, since he's obviously the one ruining our lives. But it is even in these difficult times where God is acting in love, it is in these difficult times when WE WILL KNOW THAT THE LORD IS GOD, even in times when there's lots of blood.

And WE WILL KNOW THAT THE LORD IS GOD even when in times when there's lots of blood because lots of blood was a reminder of sacrifice. Shortly after the Israelites left Egypt, God established how they would worship him, it included lots of blood from sacrifices. Morning sacrifices, evening sacrifices, sacrifices for sin, sacrifices for thanksgiving. All of these sacrifices, and all of this blood shed was not to point back to when there was lots of blood in the land of Egypt, but it was to point forward to an even greater sacrifice, an even greater shedding of blood. God taught his people, **"there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood."**

So, when God's Son would show up and walk on this earth some 1500 years later he revealed his love in his sacrifice, in the shedding of his blood. And it's not like he gave a portion of his blood with a blood donation. He didn't even give a greater amount of blood by donating a kidney, he donated his entire body, all of his blood. He gave his life to make the unlovable, loveable. He suffered death to redeem the dead.

We don't like to think about ourselves in that way – unlovable, dead – but that's the way the Bible describes us. There was nothing about us that God said, "I like that." There was nothing about us that was pleasing to God about which he said, "I need that." He didn't love us because we gave him a reason to. He loved us, and gave us a new life, his new life, that he gave up on the cross. This is love, and it was accomplished through lots of blood. This is how we KNOW THE LORD IS GOD.

That is really what the name "the LORD" signifies. Whenever you see the name "LORD" with small caps in your Bible, that's the special name for God. The Lord is a name for God which demonstrates his love and kindness. As you look through this section of Exodus, you will see that name come up several times. Throughout the Old Testament you will see that name come up. It is a constant reminder of God's love, a love that he revealed here at the Nile, a love that he revealed in his Son.

(2)

But Pharaoh didn't see it that way. Pharaoh couldn't see it that way. He was after all not only set in his ways, but he was also dead in sin. Even after seeing the power of the LORD in transforming the water of the sacred Nile into blood, even after smelling the stench of death, he would not acknowledge that THE LORD IS GOD. Instead he had some of his magicians perform the same "miracle" using their

secret arts. This was enough to satiate Pharaoh. He then turned his back on Moses and God and walked back into his house, **“he did not even take this to heart”** Moses writes.

This did not come as a surprise to Moses, for the LORD told him it would be this way, the Lord told him that Pharaoh would harden his heart. Not only did Pharaoh reject the miracle of the one true God, but he accepted the lesser “miracle” his own magicians performed by the power of the devil. For it to make sense, shouldn’t the magicians have performed a miracle of changing the bloody water back into drinkable water? But no, they just mimicked Moses’ miracle. Which is really all the devil attempts to do. This is why Martin Luther called the devil God’s ape, because he only mimics (poorly) what God does.

But to show that THE LORD IS GOD, the LORD worked his plan despite hardened hearts. It was actually through Pharaoh’s hardened heart that the Lord accomplished his purpose. Through the ten plagues, God could show his people and the world that HE WAS THE LORD. He would bring his people out of Egypt and he would crush Egypt for their idolatry. The LORD worked his plan despite hardened hearts. But it is not just here that the LORD worked his plan through hardened hearts, it’s found all over Scripture. The Israelites found themselves in Egypt because of the hardened hearts of Jacob’s sons against their brother Joseph. It was through the hardened heart of Judas that the Savior was betrayed. Also in the New Testament, as an attempt to squash Christianity, the Jews persecuted Christians in Jerusalem. This only caused the Christians to scatter and spread the cause of the gospel.

And the LORD still works his plan despite hardened hearts, in our lives and in the lives of unbelievers. It can be through the persecution of unbelievers that believers grow in their faith and become strong. It can be in our own stubbornness that God works, when he causes trouble to come into our lives through the error of our ways. For who is man to think that he could stop the plans of the LORD?

This certainly does not mean that we should purposely be stubborn so as to show God’s plans more clearly. Paul says, **“should we go on sinning so that grace may increase all the more, by no means!”** As sinful (but redeemed) creatures, we must always be wary of the thoughts and attitudes that we may have that harden our hearts against God. It may not be in outright rejection of his Word, but it may be in a rejection of part of his Word. It may be in the rejection that Jesus Christ is the way the truth and the life, because it wouldn’t be fair for people who haven’t heard about Jesus to go to hell. It may be in the rejection that purity in God’s Word doesn’t really matter, as long as we agree on the basics. It may be in the rejection that we are purely creatures of God’s wrath, who only by the grace of God have been received into his kingdom.

Yes, as Christians, we too need to be wary of hardening our own hearts, lest we turn wholeheartedly from the gospel we confess and become like those wearied Egyptians. Pharaoh and many of his servants refused to see the love with which the LORD was calling to them. And yet God worked through their stubbornness to accomplish his purpose. We would be foolish to think he wouldn’t work despite our own stubbornness. It would be foolish for us to think we can remain in our own stubbornness, and still cling to the love of God. May our own stubbornness not be a cause for hardening our own hearts. May the only stubbornness we possess be the stubbornness to hold to the pure Word of God who trusts that the LORD reveals his love through his Son. Amen.