

Choosing The Hard Way

Text: Exodus 7:14, 11:10; 12:29-36

Series: Book of Exodus [#07]

Pastor Lyle L. Wahl

May 31, 2009

Theme: **God Prevails ... Every Time.**

Introduction

Life is filled with choices. We make many choices every day. You made a choice to come to worship here this morning, and that choice involved a number of other choices. Sometimes the choice is not about what the end goal or result is, but how we get there. There was a tree in our yard that needed to come out. It wasn't a huge tree, and so there were a few options. I could take it out myself and slowly, but surely—I hope—get rid of all the limbs and debris; or, I could have someone do it for me, quickly and efficiently ... at a cost, of course. Both options or paths led to the same result. In the end, I chose *the easy way* of having someone remove the tree rather than *the hard way* of doing it myself. Some choices are like that—do we take the easy way or the hard way?

As we come to the second half of chapter 7 in Exodus, we see the Pharaoh *choosing the hard way*. God was going to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. There was no question or doubt about that. So, for the Pharaoh the question was, “Will you listen to and go along with God, or will you resist Him?” It was, “Will you take the easy way or the hard way?” What makes this choice of the Pharaoh so critical is that God judges all who resist and reject Him. The Pharaoh chose the hard path of seeing Israel freed against his will, a hard path which brought God's judgment.

Many people today still underestimate the danger—they don't see the reality of God's holy, righteous, sovereign judgment that falls on everyone who chooses to ignore or reject him, on everyone who chooses the hard path of judgment. *God prevails every time*—there are no exceptions.

Let's look at what is involved in this hard way of judgment, and then what it means to live with that choice.

Choosing The Hard Way Of Judgment.

The hard way of judgment is the path of resisting, of rejecting God. We have already seen the Pharaoh doing this, and he remains resolute even as God delivers the ten plagues or judgments on him, his people and land. God repeatedly said to Pharaoh, “Let My people go.” Previously, in *Round 1* when Moses first delivered God's order, Pharaoh dismissed it and intensified his oppression of the Israelites. In *Round 2* when God performed the miracle of Aaron's staff becoming a snake which swallowed up the court magicians' satanic empowered copycat snakes, the Pharaoh did not listen (cf. 7:13).

Round 3 consisted of ten plagues God brought on Egypt to demonstrate His power and bring Pharaoh to his knees. Think of it, ten dramatic disasters which gave the Pharaoh opportunity after opportunity to listen to and obey God. But time after time he chose the hard way of resisting and rejecting God, the way that brought God's judgment.

Note a few examples:

- After the first plague of the Nile river being turned into blood, Pharaoh did not listen and “turned and went into his house with no concern even for this” (7:23).
- After the fourth plague of insects filled the land he pleaded with Moses to intercede with God. But after God dispersed the insects, Pharaoh still did not let Israel go. (8:32)
- After God sent devastating hail as the seventh plague, Pharaoh again asked Moses to intercede with God, but when the storm was over he again hardened his heart and would not let Israel go. (9:34-35)

We can shake our heads and wonder, “How could he, why would he do that, be so stubborn, not believe it was Almighty God doing all of this?” But the Pharaoh was not at all unique in this. The path he chose, the hard way of judgment, is the natural path for all people.

It became the natural path when our first parents chose to disobey God. The moment they did that their very nature changed. They had sinned in disobeying God, and were then sinful. They passed that nature on to their children. Each one of us has inherited it from our parents. It is a self-focused, *me at the command center* of my life nature. All of us naturally follow this path of resisting God's direction and rejecting Him.

The Bible describes this in a number of different ways.

- In Isaiah 53 we read, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (6a).
- In Romans chapter 1 Paul wrote,
“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.” (1:18-23)

- On to chapter 3 in Romans, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (23)
- And in chapter 6. “the wages of sin is death” (23a).

Yes, this path is the natural way for us. It is *the hard way of judgment*. The Pharaoh also pictures and teaches us about...

Living With The Hard Way Of Judgment.

Remember, *God prevails... every time*. His judgment prevails on all sin and sinners without exception. We see this in the ten plagues God unleashed on Egypt. The plagues were directed at the Pharaoh, his country and Egypt’s many man-made gods to demonstrate God was all-powerful and that Egypt’s gods had no power (cf. 12:12). Each plague demonstrated the powerlessness of one or more of the Egyptian gods. It’s hard to say how long a time period the plagues covered, but it would seem to have been less than a year.

Let’s take a quick walk through these ten judgments.

- The first plague or judgment was turning the Nile River’s water into blood, described in 7:14-25. The fish died. The Nile’s water was unuseable. Pharaoh’s magicians with their “secret arts” were also able to turn some water into blood. The result, 7:23-24,

“Then Pharaoh turned and went into his house with no concern even for this. So all the Egyptians dug around the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink of the water of the Nile.”
- A week later the second plague brought wall to wall frogs in Egypt, 7:28-8:15. Frogs here, frogs there, frogs everywhere—frogs in their fields, frogs on the roads, frogs in their houses, in their kitchens, and their beds. *Frogs everywhere!* God killed the frogs all at once. But even with the stench from the great piles of dead frogs as a strong reminder, 8:15 tells us, “But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.”
- Next came the gnats, sand flies, or mosquitoes, described in 8:16-19. The term isn’t clear on exactly which these were, but the pesky insects covered the whole land. Yet the Pharaoh would not listen.
- If that were not enough, the fourth plague brought swarms of flies that covered the land and filled the houses of all of the Egyptians. It was so bad that Pharaoh did some bargaining with Moses and said he would let the people go if God removed these pests. But once they were gone, Pharaoh did not let the people go.
- Chapter 9 opens with a plague on the livestock of Egypt. This infectious disease attacked and killed the horses, donkeys, cattle, sheep, and goats of the Egyptians. Pharaoh still would not bow before and obey God.
- The sixth plague, in 9:8-12, takes the element of disease in a different direction: painful boils with running sores broke out on all the Egyptians and their remaining

livestock. Yet Pharaoh did not give in.

- The seventh plague, 9:13-35, brought rain and a hail such as had never been before. The hail injured and killed men and livestock, stripped trees bare. Pharaoh begged Moses to have God intercede and told him he would let the people go. But when God brought an end to it, Pharaoh would not let the people of Israel go.
- Chapter 10 opens with the God bringing in an all time record number of locusts. There may have been little left after the earlier plagues, but what was left these locusts stripped bare. Seeing it, the Pharaoh rushed to Moses, asked him to get rid of them and then he and his people could go. God got rid of the locusts. Pharaoh did not let Moses and his people go.
- The ninth plague, in the last part of chapter 10, was a plague of darkness—so dark you could feel the darkness; so thick that no one went anywhere for the three days. God kept the lights on for Goshen, where the Israelites lived, to show He was in control. Pharaoh tried to bargain with Moses, but would not let the people go.
- The tenth and last plague is announced in the first part of chapter 11 and carried out in the last part of chapter 12. At midnight on the appointed day, God struck, killed all the firstborn children and cattle of the Egyptians. Finally, with this great, personal, heart-wrenching devastation Pharaoh relented and let Israel go. *But*, as we will see in chapter 14, in a very short time he sent his armies after them.

Remember, *God prevails... every time*. His judgment prevails on all sin and sinners without exception. It was true in Egypt 3,500 years ago. It is true in Edmonton today. It is part of living with the hard way of judgment. You and I will never display resistance and rejection to God that will bring about such dramatic disasters of God's judgment affecting so many people. But that is matter of degree, not of substance or quality. The ultimate, certain judgment of God of everlasting separation from Him and rightful punishment for sin faces everyone who does not *bow the knee* to Him in this life, who dies without placing their faith in Jesus Christ. *God's judgment prevails on all sin and sinners without exception*.

Next, living the hard way of judgment brings suffering not only to the guilty ones, but also to others. All of our actions affect others. The impact of what we do is like a rock thrown into water—there are ripples that go out, sometimes a great distance, sometimes with devastating results. Let's look at two examples of the Pharaoh's stubborn-hearted resistance and rejection causing others to suffer.

First, all the Egyptians suffered in these judgments. In fact, many of them suffered more than he did. Some died. He was in the palace and had many people to help him deal with the water, frog, gnat, fly, disease, boil, hail, locust, darkness, and even the death disasters. God did not do a pin point, surgical strike just on Pharaoh. God does not isolate us from those around us in the good and bad. All of us need to take others into consideration as we make our choices, especially in relationship to God.

Then, the people of Israel also suffered. These are God's people, the ones with whom He

made an everlasting covenant, the ones whom He is going to free from their slavery. Yet God did not shield them from all the suffering He brought upon the Pharaoh and Egypt.

- The Israelites suffered through the plague of the Nile River being turned to blood, destroying the fish and making its vital water unuseable.
- They suffered through the infestation of wall to wall frogs and the mess and stench left behind.
- They suffered the gnats filling the land, afflicting them and their livestock.

It is not until the fourth plague that God protected them from the remaining plagues, as 8:22 says, “in order that you [Pharaoh] may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land.” God’s own people suffered because the Pharaoh resisted and rejected God.

Choosing the hard way of God’s judgment is never isolated. Others will suffer because of our choice to resist and reject God, whether it be to not place our faith in Him or, as His children, to not obey Him in faith. We will suffer because of the choice others make to resist and reject God—those who we know, those who are close to us, and those we don’t know.

A third dynamic of living the hard way of judgment is that foxhole faith often is short lived. In World War II the allies moved from shallow trench defences for one soldier to deeper vertical, bottle-shaped holes that allowed the soldier to stand and fight and also to crouch down when under fire. It was often said, “There are no atheists in a foxhole.” There have been many intense, sincere prayers by soldiers in foxholes when under attack. However, many of those “If only You will save me from being killed” promises to God were quickly forgotten after the soldier survived the crisis.

Let’s review a few of the Pharaoh’s foxhole faith moments. When God brought frogs wall to wall,

“Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, ‘Entreat the LORD that He remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the LORD’” (8:8).

But when he saw “that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen...” (8:15).

When God devastated the land with that great hail,

“Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the LORD, for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer’” (9:27-28).

By now it is no surprise that 9:34-35 tells us “But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go...”

Then when God sent locusts to devour what little was left,

“Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, ‘I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and make supplication to the LORD your God, that He would only remove this death from me.’”

(10:16-17)

But, again, once God removed them “he did not let the sons of Israel go” (10:20).

Pharaoh’s foxhole faith was short lived.

And so it continues to now. In times of suffering, pain and disaster there are many foxhole prayers and promises that are quickly forgotten. Many who cry out to God in those times never really submit to God and place their faith in Him. And for those who do, we too sometimes make desperate calls and promises that we soon forget. God’s word to us in Ecclesiastes 5 is instructive:

“Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words. When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?” (5:1-6)

And then finally, living the hard way of judgment does not negate the mercy of God. In God’s judgment there is mercy. God was merciful to Israel as He spared them from the last seven of the ten devastating plagues. God was even merciful to Pharaoh. In 9:15-16 He told him

“For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.”

Later in this book of Exodus God declared to Moses that He is

“The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will

by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” (34:6-7).

God is merciful. It is part of His nature. Even when we were spiritually dead, separated from God and under judgment in our sin,

“God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”

(Ephesians 2:4-5)

Without God’s grace and mercy there would be no hope for any of us.

But also, there is absolutely no place for Christians in effect to say “God has saved me. He knows I am weak, I’m far from perfect. So, when I sin, when I hang on to a few sinful things, He understands.” Romans 2:4 tells us

“do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”

Then in Romans 6,

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (1-2)

Conclusion.

God Prevails... Every Time.

We’ve seen some difficult, even horrible things in this section of Scripture. It is much more pleasant to think about God’s love, grace and blessings. His righteous judgment is just as real, and never is pleasant.

For you who know you have bowed your knee, have placed your faith in Jesus Christ and have been forgiven of your sins and are God’s child, the truth we have seen today is for you. Yes, your salvation and eternal destiny is secure in Christ. Yes too, God disciplines His children. Yes, only what we do in faith and obedience will be rewarded by Christ.

Perhaps you have been too casual and independent in your relationship with God.

- You may be so focused on your goals, things and life that you haven’t really been listening to and following God as you should.
- You may have some things in your life you know should not be there.
- You may have made promises to God you are not keeping.

Today is the time to get everything straightened out with God, to truly surrender all you are and have to Him and His direction.

For you who have not really bowed your knee, have not yet placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you still are on the hard way of judgment. Today is the time for you to come to God, to surrender the control of your life to Him, to ask Him to forgive all your sins because of Jesus' death and resurrection for you, to ask Him for life now and forever with Him.

In the next few silent moments, let each of us come to God thanking Him that He loves us and is merciful, thanking Him that Jesus Christ on the cross took all the punishment we deserved for our sins. And also, making sure we have bowed our knee, surrendered all of ourselves to God.

© 2009. Lyle L. Wahl

Scripture, unless otherwise noted, taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.
Used by permission.