

The LORD Has No Rival

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[0 : 00] Let's pray as we get started this morning. Lord, God, we ask for your help this morning. As we look at this passage, we ask that you would help us to take away distractions and also open our eyes, open our heart to hear what you have for us.

Help us to see past just the physical things like the plagues and see the work that you're doing. Lord, we ask that you would direct us and teach us and encourage us through your word this morning.

And it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen. Two weeks ago, when we ended chapter six, we saw how Moses doubted what the Lord was telling him.

If you look back the last couple verses of chapter six, verse 28, on the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, the Lord said to Moses, I am the Lord.

Tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, all that I say to you. And then verse 30, Moses says to the Lord, but I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?

[1 : 20] Have you ever put time and effort into something only to find out that it kind of didn't matter in the end? It was a kind of a waste of time. Like, you clean your house because you want it to look nice and somebody's coming over only to find out they're running late and they never get past the front door.

Or you're asked to prepare a presentation for a meeting and the meeting runs long or something and you don't get to do your part that you stayed up late preparing for.

Or maybe you spent ten bucks having your car washed and the next day it rains and now it doesn't look any different than before. It's kind of what we see Moses struggling with because the Lord is telling him it's not about you.

It's not the skill of your lips or any persuasive abilities that you have. Now, God is saying those things don't matter because it doesn't matter what you do.

Pharaoh is not going to listen to you. Now, if it was me and it might have been Moses, I would probably be scratching my head at this point thinking, then what's the point?

[2 : 30] Why am I going to Pharaoh if he's not going to listen? I mean, God, you had some pretty awesome miracles in the wilderness. But if that's your plan here in Egypt, it's not looking very great to me.

But that was just the beginning of God's plan and God begins to unfold it in chapter 7. We pick it up in verse 4 where it says, Pharaoh will not listen to you.

I love this kind of this three-fold description that God says, my hosts, my armies, they're not even going to fight.

I'll do that for them. God says, here's the plan.

It will be my power, using the person of my choosing, this case is Moses, to bring about my purpose. That's why I have the title for this morning is God's power through his person bringing about his purpose.

[4 : 03] The purpose God lists are two. One is to make himself known to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. And two, it was to rescue his people.

It will be through great acts of judgment that the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord. He says, and it will be through great acts of deliverance that the Israelites will know that I am the Lord.

That was God's plan. Make himself known, demonstrate his glory through great salvation and through great judgment. Salvation for the Israelites, judgment for the Egyptians.

Now I know that brings us to a difficult subject. It surfaced back in chapter 5, chapter 4, and it becomes a prominent theme as the interactions with Pharaoh increase and as the plagues come on the scene.

The topic is the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. God's power above all things, including us, and our responsibility for our actions.

[5 : 22] I've struggled with this in this passage, the words and how to feel about it. And I pray that as I deliver this message to you this morning that I don't muddy the waters in your mind.

I'm not going to be able to give you an easy sentence that's going to leave you with, I got it, that all makes sense, I'm good now. This is something that you will wrestle with for your lifetime.

But it's a good wrestle. I think that tension has to stay there. We don't want to remove our responsibility from the things that we should do or should not do.

And at the same time, we don't want to take away power from God. See, if God is not completely free to use his power as he decides, he's not truly God.

It started back in chapter 4, like I said, verse 21. It says, Here we see God's plan to harden Pharaoh's heart.

[6 : 46] Next, if we look in chapter 5 at verse 2, Pharaoh says, Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord. And moreover, I will not let Israel go.

So in this verse, we actually get a picture of Pharaoh's heart. The Lord is unknown to him. And he does not care. The stance of his heart is one that is hard toward God.

He has no desire to know him. And really, before God changes anyone's hearts, that's our stance from the beginning.

It's through the work of the Holy Spirit that starts to change our hearts and open our eyes to who God really is. Why do I bring this out now?

Why do I bring this out now?

[8 : 10] It wasn't innocent. Pharaoh starts out standing guilty before God as a sinner, having a heart that is wicked and far from him.

So when God hardens Pharaoh's heart, he's not hardening a sinless, God-fearing, God-worshipping sinner, or God-worshipping person, and then judging him based on that hardening that he just did.

No, God is hardening an already hard-hearted person. He's not forcing Pharaoh to become hardening.

He's holding him in his hardness. In essence, giving him over to what he already wants and has a propitiation for and towards his stubbornness.

He doesn't know God. He doesn't need a God. And he doesn't want a God. I think we all relate to that. He could choose to soften Pharaoh's heart, but he doesn't.

[9 : 22] And we get an answer in a couple different places. In verse 5, it says that the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. If we look back to chapter 6, it says, the Lord says about the Israelites that they shall know that I am their God.

Those are the reasons why God is using Pharaoh the way that he is for his purpose, for his glory. I hope that that helps a little bit.

I'm sure it's going to come up again for some of the other plagues later in Exodus. And I'm sure it's something that you might discuss in your community groups.

But for sake of time, let's jump back to the rest of the text. Remembering that God has the power and the person to carry out his purpose.

So starting in verse 8, we have this pre-plague intro scene, right? Where the Lord says to Moses, listen, you're going to go to Pharaoh. And Pharaoh is going to say, prove yourself with a miracle.

[10 : 27] When he does, I want you to throw your staff down in front of Pharaoh. And it will turn into a serpent. And sure enough, that's exactly what took place. The fact that God just knew Pharaoh was going to say, prove yourself with a miracle, is something in and of itself.

But then to go and see these things happen is pretty amazing. Pharaoh is not amazed, though. Aaron's staff turns into a serpent and Pharaoh calls his sorcerers, guys, come here, I need you to do this.

And they do. It says, and they, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts.

Now I want to pause here for a minute because as many of you know, Daniel, my son, practices magic. Good magic.

It's not bad magic. It's not bad magic. I think he's very good at it. There are secrets to his art that make the tricks look really cool.

[11 : 36] Like you were tricked. They're fun to watch. They're cool to watch. And many times I don't understand how he did it. I just enjoy it. But the magic and the secret arts that are referred to here in verse 11 is not the same magic and arts that Daniel practices.

What Daniel does is fun to watch. It's enjoyable to be tricked, to learn something from it. But there's no power that he's using outside of his physical abilities.

However, in this passage, we see a power on display that is outside of normal ability. It's a supernatural power and its source is not God.

Some people say that they actually did tricks, fooled their eyes into thinking that they turned a stick into a serpent.

For sake of time, I won't go into reasons why I think that's a little crazy, but we can talk about that later if you want. I've heard them say that you can take a certain snake and if you hold its neck just right, it'll stiffen up like a staff.

[12 : 51] And so you could hold it and people would think it's a staff and as you threw it to the ground, it would turn to a snake. That could be one. I think you run into problems if you hold that same thought for all the other plagues as well.

Something that has to be rehearsed ahead of time. And yet all the magicians there standing in front of Pharaoh do it pretty well.

Deuteronomy 18.10 says this about sorcerers. Because I believe the word in this passage says that those are the magicians that Pharaoh called.

Deuteronomy 18.10 through 12 says this. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering.

Anyone who practices divination or tells fortune or interprets omens. Or a sorcerer or a charman or a median or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead.

[13 : 56] For whoever does these things is abomination to the Lord. So here we have a connection between a sorcerer in this passage and a practice that is an abomination to the Lord.

So if there's power involved, where does it come from? If it's outside of normal human ability, there's only two sources of power.

And that's either from God or from Satan. Satan and his demons very much have power. As a quick example, we can look at Acts 16.

So this is Paul, Barnabas, walking through the city. And this is what they said. As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune telling.

Now we could think she just has a gift and that's all her own abilities. But what does Paul do to help this little slave girl? He commands the evil spirit to come out of her.

[15 : 07] And now that spirit of divination, that ability to fortune tell is no longer there. She had a supernatural power that was not of her. It was from a demon. It was from a spirit.

It wasn't from the Lord and it wasn't from her. That's the power that we're looking at here on the side of Pharaoh and the magicians. It was not of God, but it was subordinate to God.

We know this right from the beginning because what happens to the other serpents is they get eaten by Aaron's staff. And after this display of power, what do we see happen in verse 13?

Still, Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not listen as the Lord had said. That brings us to plague number one.

Starting in verse 14, let's read to the end of the chapter. Then the Lord said to Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hardened. He refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water.

[16 : 13] Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. And you shall say to him, the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you saying, let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness.

But so far you have not obeyed. Thus says the Lord, by this you shall know that I am the Lord.

Behold, with the staff that is in my hand, I will strike the water that is in the Nile and it shall turn into blood.

The fish in the Nile shall die and the Nile will stink and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile. And the Lord said to Moses, say to Aaron, take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, their ponds and their pools of water, so that they may become blood and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in

vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.

Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile and all the water in the Nile turned into blood.

And the fish in the Nile died and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts.

[17 : 33] So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened and he would not listen to them as the Lord had said. Pharaoh turned and went into his house and he did not take even this to heart.

And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile. Seven full days passed after the Lord struck the Nile.

We're not told why God chose the first plague to be turning the water of the Nile into blood. We can guess. It's interesting that the previous Pharaoh before this one sought to eliminate Israel's growing strength by throwing baby boys into the Nile.

And here through this first plague, we kind of see the Nile as it were turning against the Egyptians. The Egyptians' greatness, their establishment as a world power was primarily because of the Nile River.

The water and the resources that it provided cannot be matched by anything else. The transportation that was available to them because of the Nile.

[18 : 44] It brought prosperity and security to the entire nation. It's why the Nile was personified and worshipped as one of their gods.

They needed the Nile. The Nile brought Egypt life. I think that's also why God targeted the Nile for his first plague. God didn't start out with a heavy plague because he wanted to soften Pharaoh's heart.

See, God's plan wasn't one hard plague and nine backups in case Pharaoh didn't change his mind. No, God's plan was all ten plagues.

And this first plague was a warning bell that signaled to Pharaoh and his people that judgment had begun.

All the water in the Nile was turned to blood. All the water that was connected to the Nile, it says turned to blood. The fish died. The river stank.

[19 : 51] Some people argue that this could have been a natural phenomenon. One popular one is red tide, right?

So there's a type of red algae bloom that appears when the conditions are right. And it can reproduce in great numbers, so spread quickly in the water.

And in the water, it appears as if it had been stained a bloody red. But there are several obstacles that stand in the way of that being believable.

And the first one is the speed of the event. That natural occurring event happens, but it does take some time to travel down a river to its subsidiaries, into ponds.

So as we read it, this happens seemingly within the same day of Aaron stretching out his staff. So it doesn't seem to fit that it could go that fast.

[20 : 56] Another issue is if it was a natural event, then when it was showed to Pharaoh and his wise men, how come Pharaoh just didn't say, so what?

That happens. Every few years, every 50 years, we've heard about it happening in the past, the water turns red, no big deal. He wouldn't have asked his magicians to try to duplicate that.

We do see in the passage that his magicians, his sorcerers, do actually duplicate turning water into blood.

Seems kind of comical to think about. I'm not sure how that happened. Like, where'd you get the clean water so that you could turn that into blood?

And why would you turn it into blood? It was the last of your clean water. But anyway, that's what it says took place, and they were able to duplicate that.

[21 : 58] But what they couldn't duplicate was reversing or stopping what had happened. All they could do was just make a little bit more blood. Doesn't seem like a concern to Pharaoh because, again, we read that his heart remained hardened, and he wouldn't listen to them, as the Lord had said.

The Nile, the heart of Egypt, was just attacked by God, and it lost. And verse 23 says, Pharaoh turned and went into his house.

He did not take even this to heart for seven days. Seven days of no clean water. It does talk about them digging along the Nile.

There could have been other sources of water underground that weren't connected to the Nile.

They had to work for any water they got. And for seven days, this occurred.

Seven days, fish died. Seven days, the river stank. Brings us to our second plague. We read about it in chapter 8.

[23 : 11] We'll read the first 15 verses. Then the Lord said to Moses, Go into Pharaoh and say to him, Thus says the Lord, Let my people go that they may serve me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs.

The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into the house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people and into your ovens and your kneading bowls.

The frogs shall come up on you and your people and on all the servants. And the Lord said to Moses, Say to Aaron, Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh called to Moses and Aaron and said, Plead with the Lord and take away the frogs from me and from my people and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord. Moses said to Pharaoh, Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.

[24 : 29] And he said, Tomorrow, Moses says, Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God. The frogs shall go away from you and your houses and your servants and your people.

They shall be left only in the Nile. So Moses and Aaron went up from Pharaoh and Moses and cried to the Lord about the frogs as he had agreed with Pharaoh. And the Lord did according to the word of Moses.

The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards and the fields and they gathered them together in heaps and the land stank. But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them as the Lord had said.

Frogs. So how many frog collectors out there? Okay. How many people as a kid, girls, you can raise your hand, but I know you, generally girls don't like frogs, right?

How many boys out there as a kid like to collect a frog? Come on, beyond. Oh, we got some girls too. All right. Honesty. I love it. All right. It's natural, right? You're like, you see frogs, but they're not so many that, you know, you see one and you're like, oh, frog, cool.

[25 : 36] Let me catch it. I don't know why. It's just what you did as a boy or as a young girl. It was kind of cool. Like a little pet for the day. You know, like everybody wants to walk a frog down the sidewalk with a leash, right?

But seriously speaking, we're talking about a lot of frogs. We're talking about frogs everywhere.

See, the Nile River ran through Egypt with cities and towns built all around it and the river that was once a source of refreshment and life is now a source of unending frogs.

Suddenly frogs aren't so cool anymore. Right? I lived in Alabama for a year when I was about 11 and they had these ant hills.

They had fire ants in Alabama. They look like regular ants, but they bite. And when they're done, they leave a bump and it itches like a mosquito bite. It's not cool.

They're not normal ants. They're evil. So as a kid, you feel like you're doing justice whenever you could demolish an ant hill, right?

[26 : 53] Because they had it coming to them. They were of Satan, so we're doing God a favor. But the thing about these ants is if you stuck a stick into their ant hill or you knocked a piece of the hill off, suddenly they all came out in the, by the hundreds.

And if you were anywhere nearby, they were coming on you. So if you left the stick in there, they would go up the stick. They would go up your arm. They would head for your feet. They just, they

covered the land around it.

They were protecting their home. I thought of that when I thought about the frogs because we're not just talking about a few frogs, but as the river became a source of frogs, they just spread out.

They covered everything. They're in to everything. You open the door of your house. 50 of them jump in and you can't stop them.

You have to shuffle around to keep from stepping on them. If you step on them, then you got to deal with the frog guts, right? So you don't want to step on them. They're on your bed. You have to move them out of the way just to lay down.

[27 : 56] You can't walk on the street. You can't sit on the bus without moving a frog out of the way. They were everywhere. Why choose frogs?

It seems like a weird annoyance to choose frogs. Again, we don't know exactly why, but if we look at the frog, we can get some hints.

It was, in ancient Egypt, it was a symbol of fertility, of water and renewal. Their water god actually appeared as a woman with the head of a frog.

The frog was a symbol of another goddess. The Egyptians had many who ruled conception and birth. So Egyptian women commonly would wear a frog or some type of frog jewelry so that they would gain good favor to this god as they were carrying a child.

See, frogs were a favorable symbol, a sign of abundance, because as the rains came each year and the water was flooded, the frogs would multiply.

[29 : 08] It wasn't seen as a bad thing. It was seen as a sign for our water and our lands being blessed. So here we see that happening, but to a much greater degree.

This plague doesn't seem to take long to annoy Pharaoh because he quite quickly goes to Moses and Aaron and says, you gotta plead with God, take these guys away.

It annoys me. Not because I listen to you or to God, but because it's an annoyance and I want it to go away. Moses, interestingly, on the off chance that someone may miss the power that went behind stopping these frogs, he said, okay, I'll do that, but I want you to tell me when you want the frogs to stop.

Personally, I would say, how about right now, make them go away. Pharaoh, probably being stubborn, says, tomorrow, I want you to make the frogs go away. Moses says, fine, that's what I'll do.

And so he goes to God, he pleads Pharaoh's case, and the next day, the frogs go away. Although they don't just go away. This is like, from a father wanting to teach a lesson to a child, it's kind of funny.

[30 : 29] He doesn't just make the frogs go back to the Nile, he makes them die right where they are. So that you remember who brought this plague, I'm gonna make you think about it as you're cleaning up these frogs and as you're heaping them up and as your land stinks, I want you to remember what is taking place.

And then where does that leave Pharaoh in verse 15? It says, Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, he would not listen to them as the Lord has said.

How many times have we done that? If we're honest with ourselves, we struggled with something, we struggled through a trial, we messed something up, maybe it was money or with a relationship or with work, ask God to help us through it, we make a deal, God, if you'll just get me through this, I'll do this, this, and this.

And then once we get a respite from that, a break, what happens? We forget about it and we go back to where we were. We do it.

May we change from doing that. May we not be like Pharaoh and grow in our faith, grow in our Christ likeness. So thank him for bringing us through the trial.

[31 : 56] Praise him for the respite that we get, but then ask him for help for the day-to-day so that we are kept from going back into that thing that we needed saving from.

Pharaoh got a break. Instead of turning, he continued against the Lord. God's power through his person bringing about his purpose.

That brings us to the third plague, our last one this morning. Let's jump down to verse 16, just 16 to 19. The Lord said to Moses, say to Aaron, stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.

And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth and they were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt.

The magicians tried by their secret art to produce gnats, but they could not. So they were gnats on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God.

[33 : 03] But Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not listen to them as the Lord had said. This plague is a little different than the first two. First God sends this one without warning.

The first two, there's a warning. Here we don't have one. Moses and Aaron are just sent and they do it. That's what God tells them to do.

The second thing that's different about this plague is that the magicians are unable to copy what Moses and Aaron did. With God's power, Moses and Aaron instructed to strike the dust of the earth and create gnats.

Dust to life. Sounds familiar if we think back to Genesis 2. Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living creature.

See, magicians can't duplicate what happened because even with a gnat, a gnat is life and only God can create life. The magicians realize that they are up against something far greater than themselves and they say to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God.

[34 : 23] They saw what was different. But then we have this phrase that keeps repeating, but Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not listen to them as the Lord had said.

God's power through his person bringing about his purpose. If you can recall in the beginning of chapter 7 as we started out, the Lord told Moses, see, I have made you like God to Pharaoh.

God chose to show his power through Moses to bring about his purpose. Moses functioned as God to Pharaoh, mediating God's word and power and ultimately bringing salvation to Israel.

Moses did that as God worked through him. Salvation coming for the Israelites and it came through Moses. It is here that we get a foreshadowing of Jesus.

We can say that Jesus is like a second Moses, a better Moses, thank God. Jesus, obviously greater than Moses because he is God, not man who will die off and not just in a functional sense like Moses.

[35 : 50] In John 10, 30, Jesus says, this is Jesus talking, he says, I and the Father are one. Moses could not say that. He was functioning as God to Moses but he was not God.

Moses was the mediator between God and Pharaoh. Jesus is our mediator. Between us and God, Jesus stands.

God's word, his power, his will, his attributes, what he wants, what he doesn't want, all that is made known to us through Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 2.5 says, for there is one God and there is one mediator between God and man and that man is Christ Jesus. If you're not a Christian this morning, then I want to ask you, don't harden your hearts like Pharaoh did.

Salvation is available but not through yourself. Salvation is available only through Jesus. See, if we don't put our belief and trust in Jesus and what he did for us on the cross to cover our sins, because we can't, we don't, we have no standing before God.

[37 : 19] So if that's you, I would plead with you not to leave until you talk to someone. I'll be up here after the service. There's other people in this room that you can talk to.

If you're a Christian today, I want to encourage you with the title of our message. God's power through his person bringing about his purpose.

See, in our passage this morning, that person was Moses. It also applies very much to that person being Jesus Christ, our Savior.

God's power through his person, Jesus Christ, brings about his purpose, salvation for us. But there's another level to that too. It also applies to us.

because if we're saved, we know that God has a purpose for us and if we're saved, the Holy Spirit lives in us so we have power that he has given us.

[38 : 20] So be encouraged knowing that God's power is available to us for his purpose. Let's not fall into the same trap that Moses did, thinking that he needed to bring skills and abilities and power enough to bring about God's purpose.

That wasn't the case. See, God will supply what we need to bring about his purpose. Let's pray this morning. Lord, we thank you for this passage.

We thank you for these more than illustrations, these life examples. And even though they come with difficult struggles with the hardening of heart and Pharaoh and what Pharaoh was even born for, through all of that, your glory is on display.

Your power is at the top. And so, Lord, we want to glorify you this morning. We also want to learn from what you have in your word.

So, Lord, we pray that you would just encourage us as we go. Help us to realize that you have given us power through the Holy Spirit. You have a purpose for us, not because we're special, but because you are everything.

[39 : 44] God, may we glorify you this week as we keep those things in our mind. We pray these things in your name. Amen. Amen.