

Lenten Devotional 2020

Wednesday, March 4, 2020
Day 7, Exodus 7

Establishing A Reputation

Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. (Exodus 7:1)

Reputations are important things. In my teenage years, knowing people's reputations was key to navigating the world. If someone had a reputation for being really aggressive you had to be careful how you looked at them and spoke to them. If someone had a reputation for being wild you probably didn't want to get in the car they were driving. Even in my adult life reputations are still important. They let us know who is trustworthy or untrustworthy, who is kind, or angry, or false. Reputations are a map that help us to navigate our world.

This was also true in the ancient world. A key to understanding Hebrew Scripture is to understand the world it resides in. Today we talk about God as if that word had only one referent to it. In the ancient world there were many gods. So when Moses and Aaron show up and say that the God of the Israelites demands that his people be let go in order to worship their God, Pharaoh asks the question what god? Who is he? The follow up question is why should your god trump any of my gods? At this point in the story Israel's God didn't have a reputation or he had a bad one (since his people are a slave people this would mean Egypt's gods are greater than Israel's god).

So, Israel's God is establishing a reputation for himself. You and I know from Genesis that the God of Israel is the one true God who created all things. But, he has been forgotten. Other peoples, like the Egyptians, have their own stories about how the heavens and the earth came to be. But, the time has come for YHWH to reveal through Israel and by his power that he is the true God of creation who has made a covenant with Israel. This will be demonstrated by his judgment of Egypt and their gods (like the Nile) and the deliverance of his people from captivity. They will know that his is YHWH! He is establishing his reputation.

In our modern civilized civilization we can be a bit uncomfortable with the plagues. We tend to read (and have been taught to read) these Bible stories as good guys and bad guys. However, that's not a helpful or accurate reading of Scripture. We always have to keep in mind why God chose for himself a people. It wasn't to just bless one nation. It is because through that nation all the other nations (creation as a whole) would be blessed. This ultimately means that all the other nations will know, serve, and worship the one true creator God who desires covenant with all people. So, what is happening in the exodus is to deliver Israel and judge Egypt, but its ultimate goal is for Egypt (and all the other nations) to know and be in relationship with YHWH. To do this it is necessary for him to establish his reputation.

In short, while the plagues are harsh they are designed to bring freedom to all people. Judgment itself is an expression of God's grace and a desire for God's blessing. We see this in the proclamation of the gospel as well. It either sets people free or binds them in their disobedience. In our lives there are times when things are not going well. This could be God trying to get our attention. This could be discipline, yes, but it is most definitely an opportunity to return to him. Hard times are a manifestation of God's grace. His reputation is that he is merciful and good, quick to forgive and faithful to make new.

Prayer

God of judgment and grace, we have come to fear judgment and understand it as hateful. The truth is your judgment is for our blessing. Help us to embrace your judgment and conform our lives to your truth. In this season of lent we pray you would examine us so we might repent and be made new. Amen.