

Lenten Devotional 2020

Thursday, March 5, 2020 & Friday, March 6, 2020
Day 8 & 9, Exodus 8 & Exodus 9

An Extremely Patient God

The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said. (Exodus 8:19)

I wrote yesterday about God establishing his reputation. Of course, in our day and age God has a very firm reputation. This is especially true for the Old Testament manifestation of God. People have decided that the God of the Old Testament is the God of wrath. This came home to me years ago when I taught a study through the book of Genesis. A participant, in frustration, said to me "when do we see the God of wrath?!" As we worked through the book she was not finding what she had expected to find.

That isn't true for everyone however. Many people expecting to find a God of wrath find just that in the pages of the Old Testament, particularly in books like Exodus. But, if we set aside our expectations and look at what is actually there, we will find instead a merciful God.

Look at how slowly God is moving. He is determined to redeem his people out of slavery but he doesn't swoop in and destroy this other nation that has enslaved his people. He instead determines to reveal himself to that people (to Pharaoh in particular). He asks Pharaoh to let the people go and when he is met with a scoff and a "no," he determines to demonstrate who he is. This he does firmly but gently.

I wonder if, as you read these chapters, you feel frustrated with Pharaoh? Why does he keep resisting letting Israel go? Why when he so clearly sees the power of God does he continue to deny God's demand to free his people? But, are you seeing the flip side? Can you see God's patience and gentleness? Certainly he won't be dissuaded. Yes, the plagues are becoming more intense, but who is ultimately responsible for this? It isn't God, it's Pharaoh.

I wonder if our same blindness and preconceived notions of God effect the way we interact with God too. I wonder how much of what we are responsible for we put onto God's shoulders? The good news is that he patiently continues to try to get our attention. Yes, perhaps our life situation is getting more intense, but that may be because we are ignoring him. C. S. Lewis says, "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Pay attention to the actual character of God. He is not a wrathful child having a tantrum. He is the living God who has made covenant with the good world he created. He is on mission to redeem that world to himself. Yes, he has to use a measure of force to accomplish this. However, it is done with patience and respect for our persons. The good and the bad news is, he will not give up on you or on me. He will continue to attempt to rescue us—all of us: Egyptian and Israelite.

Prayer

Lord of All, thank you for love, grace, mercy, and patience. Thank you for never giving up. Thank you for being committed to our redemption over our comfort. Forgive us for the way we have painted your character and help us to see your goodness. Amen.