



The Strange Goodness of God

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Exodus 9:13-35

Clint Pressley

¹³ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. ¹⁴ For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. ¹⁵ For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. ¹⁶ But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. ¹⁷ You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go. ¹⁸ Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. ¹⁹ Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.'"" ²⁰ Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, ²¹ but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field.

²² Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt." ²³ Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. ²⁴ There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. ²⁵ The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. ²⁶ Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail.

²⁷ Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, "This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. ²⁸ Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." ²⁹ Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's. ³⁰ But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God." ³¹ (The flax and the barley were struck down, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. ³² But the wheat and the emmer were not struck down, for they are late in coming up.) ³³ So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and stretched out his hands to the LORD, and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth. ³⁴ But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. ³⁵ So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

(Pastor Prays)

Later this week, we will go to the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas, TX, where, as the President, I will preside over the largest business meeting in the world. I'm a little nervous about it. Our worship team will be there leading worship on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. And look, it's been a challenging year to be the President, but also it has been a joyful year. One of the great things that I have the privilege of doing is being a part of sending missionaries out into the field. As a Southern Baptist, we have the International Mission Board that we support, and we prayed for this morning. When we give to the Plus One Mission, we are supporting missionaries on the field. As the President, I had an opportunity to be a part of the sending celebration last September. Right after I was elected president, I had a chance to go to Charlottesville, VA, on a Wednesday at the end of September. And there at First Baptist Church of Charlottesville, we had a celebration for missionaries. I got to preach and see those missionaries that I just respect so much. It was a great Wednesday night.

That Thursday morning, Kyler and I had heard that it was going to be bad weather, so we tried to get home as quickly as possible on that Thursday, September the 26th. Little did we know that that bad weather had a name. It was a storm called Helene. You might remember that Helene has decimated so much of Western North Carolina in an unprecedented way. In some cases, entire villages and little towns have been wiped away. Many of which have not been restored yet. And as bad as Helene was, the storm we just read about was even worse. Let's get the context. We are at the 7th plague; there are 10 of them. The 10th one stands alone. There

are three sets of three. We've come through the first two sets in land and water. And now we've started the last set, the 7th plague. Hail is going to fall from the sky. We are now down to the final four plagues. And when you read in the Bible, in verses 14 - 16, there is an intensification on these last plagues that are going to make the first six look like a warmup. When I read it, I thought, what do I tell my people about this passage? But if you keep looking at this passage, and when you read through it, in the midst of this catastrophic hailstorm, we see the strange goodness of God. And from this passage, what I'm hoping is that you will see...

God is Doing Good Even When it Doesn't Feel Good

The God we serve, according to the Bible, is doing good even when you can't see it, and it doesn't feel good. This is the longest plague so far. Let's go back to it and just let me point out a couple of things that I want you to see in the story. I'll just point some things out to you so you can walk out of here today knowing that, on the one hand, you have the plagues, and on the other hand, God is doing good, and I know how to apply this to my life. So, join me there in verse 13, it's very similar to how it's been before. ¹³*Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. "*¹⁴*For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.* That little phrase, "you yourself," is the inner person. In fact, if you were to read the original, it would say, I'm gonna take the plagues, and they're gonna affect you in your heart. Why? There is a purpose clause that tells you that you might know there is none like me on all the earth. Pharaoh goes down to the river to worship his pantheon gods. What Pharaoh is going to learn is there is not one in his pantheon that's close to the God of the Bible. And God is going to show Pharaoh that he is completely and utterly unique. For us, it would be like saying that the God of the Bible is not the same as the God of Islam. It's not the same God of Buddha. It's true, you, we can coexist, but we cannot co-worship. It's not the same God. And so Pharaoh is going to learn a lesson; part of the reason is for you see, there's only one true God.

Another thing we see is mercy in verse 15. ¹⁵*For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth.* Some commentators say that should be translated as I should have wiped you out. ¹⁶*But*

for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. This is what Paul picks up in Romans. The Lord says, look, I've controlled you from day one. I raised you up for a reason so that you might see the power of God. Our God is the Potter; we are the clay. God has raised up Pharaoh. If you don't like who is elected as president, stick around; God will raise somebody else. All throughout history, God has raised up monarchs and kings and rulers. Why has he done it for his own purposes?

Verse 17, the Lord says to Pharaoh, ¹⁷ *You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go.* I'm going to teach you a lesson about pride. So here comes the plague in verse 18. We have the description of the plague. It's going to be hail that's going to fall like the world has never seen. Egypt became a nation in 3200 BC. So, it's been about 1000 years of existence. There has never been a storm like what's going to happen here. Look at the warning in verse 19. It's the very first time we've seen a warning for the Egyptians. ¹⁹ *Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.* The Lord gives Pharaoh and the people listening a warning. Look, this is going to be so bad that everybody's going to die. You need to go put the animals up. You need to put the people who are your servants, you need to put them up. Look what happens in verse 20. ²⁰ *Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses,* ²¹ *but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field.* So, people standing there with Pharaoh, and they've seen Moses do all of this, and they think, you know what, there may be something to all this. We better protect our stuff. So, they put everything up. They fear the word of the Lord. It's the first time, the only time, in the Bible where you see the phrase, fear the word of the Lord. And in verse 21, there are those who did not fear the word of the Lord. They said, you know what, we're going to stick with Pharaoh. So, they reject it and then watch what happens.

Verse 22, ²² *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt."* Moses has the rod of God, the staff, in his hand and stretches it toward heaven so everybody will know where this is coming from. Stretch it toward heaven, and hail is going to fall. Now, I read the description of the hailstorm that came to you. There was hail and thunder

and fire falling; there was lightning. There's never been a storm like this in the history of the world. This was so bad that every plant was killed. Every person that was outside, every animal, and all of the plants died. All of the trees are down. It is so bad that if we had a drone flying over the footage (you know, sometimes when a tornado comes through, you can have a drone fly over the footage so you see the devastation.) We had a drone flying over Egypt, and in verse 26, we come up to a place called Goshen. We're going to see that part of the world hadn't been affected. And it is a tangible picture of those who are in Christ. Those who are not, when the storm comes, it's devastation. Unless you are in the land of Goshen, that's verse 26.

In verse 27, Pharaoh says, you know what? I've had enough of this. Watch what happens in verse 27. *²⁷ Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, "This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. ²⁸ Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer."* This time, I've sinned, not the other six times, just this one. This time, I've sinned. And not only that, he says, but the people and I were wrong. The Lord is right. We were wrong, all of us, not just me. I'm not the only one, so can you call off the dog here? Verse 28 says, *²⁸ Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.* Plead with the Lord. It's enough.

So, Moses agrees like he has before, I'll go and pray. *²⁹ Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's. ³⁰ But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God."* Moses says, I know that this is fake repentance. You've heard about fake news here is fake repentance. I know that you do not yet fear the Lord, but I'm going to do this. Verses 31 to 32 are just a description of the devastation. And in verse 33, Moses says his prayers. *³³ So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and stretched out his hands to the LORD, and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth.*

When the clouds dissipate, and the thunder and the hail are gone, Pharaoh realizes, OK, I've survived it. The worst is over. *³⁴ But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. ³⁵ So the*

heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses. He didn't fear God.

This is the story. You've got the 7th plague, so how do we apply it? What do we learn about God? Let's start with a few simple lessons. Here's the first one, number one.

God is unique

You are not unique. God is unique. There is none like him. Verse 14 says, here's why I'm doing this, Pharaoh so that you realize there is not another God like this. He gives grace to his people and forgives his people, and God loves his people. This God will actually purchase his people? I mean, do you understand that the God of the Bible, if you are his child, has purchased you by the sacrifice of his own son, Jesus? The perfect life of Jesus is our righteousness. The death of Jesus is where we get forgiveness. God applies that to our hearts. Our sins are taken away. We are covered in the righteousness of Christ. And the judgment of God in your life is taken away. You are not under the judgment of God if you are under the blood of Christ. Our God is absolutely unique in saving us. If that is the case, if God is unique, it means that his people are unique. We are different than the rest of the world. What did Jesus say to his followers about their enemies? Jesus says you are to love your enemies. Look, there is not a combat general in the world that would say we're going to face this terrible enemy, and let me tell you how we're gonna. Beat them; we're going to love them. Jesus has called his people to do something radically different. What does he say about those who persecute you? Pray for those who persecute you. We live our lives filled with the Holy Spirit, and from that, you are filled with the fruit of the spirit, love and joy, patience and kindness and goodness, self-control and gentleness. They are the fruits that display the uniqueness of your life. We deal with conflict differently. We deal with confrontation differently. We deal with one another differently. Look, we walked through tragedy differently. We forgive hurt differently. It's not that you're not sorrowful; you just carry sorrow differently. We're able to face death differently. When you get sick, you walk through it differently because our God is unique. That's one thing you learned from the plague. Let me give you a second thing to learn about God, number two.

God is omnipotent

Omni is every and potent, which is strength and omnipotence. All powerful. In verse 14, God says, I want you to know I am all-powerful. Pharaoh is the most powerful person in the world. God is going to thump his head. He's going to show his power. So, what do we do with God's power? What does that mean for us? If God is omnipotent, then we go to the one who has all the power, and we ask him to do things. Look, if your prayer is limited to leading, guiding, and directing, I'm not saying you don't need to be led, guided, and directed; you do. I'm saying take your prayers up and realize who you're asking. This God is able to do anything. Ask him to do that. Ask God to do the impossible because he is. Omnipotent. That should give you a great reason to pray. Go to him and ask. It should give you great hope. It should inform how you rely on him. It should make it so that tomorrow, you have strength for the day. Why? Because God is omnipotent. What else do we learn about God? Here is a third thing, number three.

God is merciful

Let me show you where I see that. Look what God says in verse 15 to Pharaoh. ¹⁵ *For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth.* A lot of commentators say that word, could, should be; by now, I should have put out my hand and struck you and the people with pestilence. This is what you deserve. By this time, I could have been completely right and holy and had just destroyed you already, but I haven't. God has withheld his judgment. Pharaoh deserved destruction. Think about what you actually deserve. Be careful if you think you deserve better than what you're getting. Be careful. If you think I'm not getting what I deserve, look, it's not Mother's Day. We got past that. It's not Father's Day yet. So let me just say you deserve worse than you're getting.

Think theologically with me for a moment. If you are indeed a sinner under the wrath of God, without Christ, what you deserve is a torturous eternity in hell. That's what you deserve. The mercy of God has made it so that you lived long enough; he withheld wrath so that you could hear the gospel, so your heart could respond, and you looked to Christ to save you. What you

got was not what you deserved. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Grace, are you getting more than you deserve? In truth, you are a picture of God's remarkable mercy, and he has saved you beyond what you deserve. When you look at your life, look at how he supported you. If you can't come up with anything, just think about your salvation. I learned from this passage that our God is merciful. I'm going to give you a fourth thing to consider from the 7th plague, number four.

God is sovereign

By the way, I feel like I say this one every single time, but I think all of the plagues point to this, each one, so it's worth saying that God is sovereign. What that means is God is in absolute control. You find that in verse 16. Charles Spurgeon said that, if it's a pillow, sovereignty is the pillow that the child of God can put her head down on at night and go to sleep. Why? Because God is in control. Where do I get that, verse 16? This is what the Lord says. ¹⁶ *But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.* That is to say, I was there when your mother gave birth to you. I made sure that you breathed enough to stay alive. I walked you through all of the politics and machinations of becoming a pharaoh. I made it so that you are Pharaoh at this point in time. I raised you up to show my power so that my name might be proclaimed on earth. I am the Potter; you are the clay. God raises up and deposes at his own will. He does that for his own purposes.

I find great comfort here when I think about the sovereignty of God, our good God in control of all things. It gives me great comfort. It is personally comforting to me, with all the events that are going on in my own personal life, to know our good God is doing something. Our all-wise God is in control. It's comforting to me as a pastor at Hickory Grove Baptist Church. I have to remember that this is the Lord's church. You are his people. You don't know how many times I've given you back to the Lord; here, these are your people, Lord. This is the Lord's. If you have a family or you don't yet have a family, it's good for you to remember our good, sovereign God. He's the Potter, you're the clay. If you have grown kids that have gone astray, look, he's the Potter; you're the clay. If you can ever get a hold of the sovereignty of God, you don't have to get the whole thing; just get a little bit; it's going to help you to live with diminished anxiety. I'm not saying you won't get anxious. I'm saying that when you think about the sovereignty of God,

you just are reminded that the Lord is in control. I learned that from this plague. Let me give you a fifth thing, number five.

God is on Mission

Look at it again. There are two purposes in verse 16. One of the purposes is that name of God would be great and at the end of verse 16, it says, *so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth*. That is God being on a mission. So you've read the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch is the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. When you get over to Deuteronomy, they are getting ready to go into the promised land. Joshua takes us there. He sends the spies, and the spies, in Jericho, meet a woman named Rahab. She is a prostitute, but she is a convert. She believes in God. Do you know why she believes in God? Because she heard what God did to the Egyptians with the plagues. I'm telling you that God is on a mission. He has a purpose when he does something. He does it so that his name is made famous, that the world will know him. That's why we are a church like we are, on missions. We pray for missionaries. It's why we give money. If you can't go, give. That's why missionaries that come up out of the church are not just born on the field; they're born in the church; they were disciplined in the church and come out of the church. God calls men and women to go serve on the mission field, out of the church. God calls preachers out of his church. I'm reminding you that God is on mission. That's verse 16. I'll pick up the pace; here is a sixth lesson.

God hates pride

When you read verse 17, you find out the sixth thing I learned about God, and that is that he hates pride. God hates pride. What did he say in verse 17 to Pharaoh? You are still exalting yourself against my people. You still are prideful. You know, God gives us things to humble us. God walks us through things to humble us. You might have a job, and you have people at your job that you don't like; they're there for your sanctification and humility. God gives us enemies. Like I came up in a house with my mom and dad, I came up in a home where I was told most every day, maybe twice a day. I was completely unique. Everybody loves you. You're going to be great. You're going to be famous and wonderful. And then you come out of that home, and you find out you're not. It's like, wait, Mom and Dad said I was the greatest thing in the world. But now you find that you have enemies. Why does God give you enemies? They are there to

humble you. You know why you're aging like you are, walk by a mirror and look sometime. Why is that there? I have friends who are not in our church but all across the country, and they can see all of the things we've put on YouTube. Everything we've ever done, every word I've ever said from the time I was here in 2010, they'll send me videos of myself without comment to say, look how old you are now. Well, why do we age like we do? It's for our own humility. Why do we walk through sickness? Why are our bodies not immortal? So we wouldn't rely on ourselves. In desperation, we would go to God. Why do we have the family that we have? Look, I was a perfect parent until I had children. What we learn from the Bible is that God is opposed to the proud and gives grace to the humble. So if he is humbling you, you are getting grace. Proud men and women don't bend the knee in submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Have you seen your need, or do you like Pharaoh with a hard heart? Do you see your need? God hates pride, but here is the other side of that, number seven.

God loves his people

I'll just point it out very quickly. He loves his people. Look at verses 18 – 26. When you read that section from verse 18 to verse 26, in those eight or nine verses, you're going to end up with three kinds of people. So here's the first kind in verses 18 – 20. You have people that respect the word of the Lord. So that's Pharaoh's officials. They hear what the Lord says, and they say, okay, let's put our animals up; let's put our servants away.

If you're a young man, and you're listening to someone like Joe Rogan, if you're listening to Joe Rogan or maybe a higher-brow Jordan Peterson. Joe Rogan has such a foul mouth; he's hard to listen to, so you listen to Jordan Peterson. This is a call for masculinity, and all of those things are good things. Those two guys would be in this first category; they respect the word of God, and they respect God's things, but they're not converted. It's a difference. This is different than having a fear of the word of the Lord and actually a fear of God. So that's one category.

A second category is a down in verse 21. You have those that just flat out reject, just reject. So, they're trying to call June Pride month here in Charlotte. And that's just an outright rejection of what the Bible says. So those that are not saying, hey, we respect it, they reject it.

And then, in verses 23 – 26, here's the third category. This is the children of God. This is the category of those who actually receive the saving grace of God. When you get to verse 26, everything's demolished except Goshen, where the people of God are. And if you are in Christ, that is you. That God has loved you because of what Christ has done. But when God looks at you, if you are in Jesus, he sees the righteousness of Christ. God hates pride. God loves his people, number eight.

God is not fooled

Look at the fake repentance in verse 27. So, how do you know fake repentance? I'll give you two marks. You don't always know because sometimes people are good at being hypocrites. You just don't know. But here's Pharaoh, and we see two things that mark fake repentance. The first is verse 27. Do you see the minimizing of sin? What does he say? This time, we're in the wrong. In the first six, I wasn't necessarily bad, but here, this one time, this one time, I am, so that's the minimization. Suppose you minimize your sin that is not repenting. If you are not only minimizing the sin, here's the second thing you see. There is the rationalization; he's rationalizing sin. What does he say? The Lord is right, me and the people were wrong. Like, I'm not the only one. There are others doing this. That's a straight rationale, not repentance. Repentance is the grief that your heart feels over your own sin and offense to God or offending someone else, and that grief leads to you turning away from sin and walking in another direction. There is an absolute change. Repentance is when you see your need for God's undeserving grace in Christ. God is not fooled. Let me give you one last lesson that we learned, number nine.

God is to be feared

Moses says in verse 29, ²⁹ *Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's.* OK, I'm going to say the prayers, God will pull this away. But look what Moses says, he's getting strong in verse 30. ³⁰ *But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God."* Do you fear the Lord God? What does it mean to fear the Lord God? If you fear the Lord, it means you stand in all of his grace. You understand your sin is before God, and you can't believe that God actually saved you, that he loves you. You stand in awe of his grace. If you fear God, you appreciate his supreme wisdom. You see that he is an all-wise God. You see, he is the Potter; you are the clay. And although you don't understand everything, you submit to that. He is God, and you are not. To fear God is to worship his greatness. If you go and stand on the edge of the Grand Canyon, you look out over that, and you think, God did that. You stand at the beach, and you look out at the ocean, and you think how that is God's creation. You look at the Smoky Mountains, and you think how good God's creation is. Or you think about God sustaining you through so much, and you worship God because of that. Or you think of your own salvation, how God saved you. Or you think of God's Providence, how he's providing for you, and that leads you to worship his greatness. That's what it means to fear God. And when you fear God, you fear the consequences of disobedience. If you were to take this sinful act, what would happen three, four, or five steps down the road? Whose heart is going to be broken? How is the name of God going to be besmirched? How does it hurt the church? You fear that happening.

To fear God means that you love the gospel and live it. You trust that Christ lived perfectly in your place, and he took away the wrath of God on the cross. Christ was raised from the dead for your eternal life, and you believe that alone saves you, and you walk in that. These plagues are difficult to read. But these stories are here for us to show us that God is doing good even when it doesn't feel good.

(Pastor prays)