

EXODUS #7 10-27-13
Pharaoh vs. the King

(Exodus 4) Today's sermon is entitled Pharaoh vs. the King, and it has nothing to do with Elvis Presley. It has everything to do with the interaction of the God of Israel with the Pharaoh of Egypt, that vile toad that squatted on the throne of the world's greatest nation. They say that power corrupts and there are few examples of that better than Pharaoh. He was a man caught up with the seeming endlessness of his own might. But He was soon to meet his match. It really wasn't much of a match. In fact it reminds me of the movie I saw in college - I'm sure some of you have seen it - the title was Bambi Meets Godzilla. How many of you saw that? It was the shortest film I've ever seen. This is true! I would show it here but some of you parents wouldn't appreciate it. You get a few minutes of credits with this lovely music showing Bambi nibbling on grass in a field. When the credits are over this giant foot descends with a WHOMP! and the movie is over. Pardon me for spoiling the ending for you movie goers. But when I thought of Pharaoh vs. Yhwh that naturally came to mind.

Let's get into the story of the Exodus again and begin in chapter 6 after the Lord had told Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand he let the children of Israel depart Egypt. 6:**1-2** *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he will let them go, and under compulsion he will drive them out of his land."* 2 *God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord."* Now that was no surprise to you - you know the story. And it was no surprise to Moses either because God told him this would happen. 4:**21** *The Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.* God let Moses know up front that Pharaoh was not going to be an easy sell. In fact, God not only predicted that Pharaoh would have a hard heart toward the Hebrews He takes on the job of ensuring that. God said, "I will harden his heart." I know that sounds hard to understand so let me help you. I studied the original Hebrew on this and discovered that what God is really saying is that He will harden Pharaoh's heart. Make no mistake about it, God says what He means and means what He says and He says this numerous times. 7:**3a** *I will harden Pharaoh's heart.* 9:**12a** *And the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart* 10:**20a** *But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart/* 11:**10** *Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh; yet the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go out of his land.* Now I should say that is pretty clear. God did it. He admits it repeatedly

and does not seem the least bit ashamed over it or confused by it. But we can easily be confused by it.

Would anyone here like to explain this to us? Well I guess I'm stuck with the job but don't expect too much out of me because when we talk about God's work on human hearts we enter into the mystery of divine sovereignty and human freedom. Now, the Scriptures teach both. The Bible says that God is absolutely in control, foreordaining all things by the word of his power and yet somehow, at the same time, human beings are free moral agents making choices without coercion. We hear Peter say in Acts 2 that the atoning death of Jesus which God foreordained, the Jews carried out willingly and blamefully. The fact that God planned it, and God would see it through in no way negates the blame of men who sin. If that strikes you as a moral and philosophical problem you are not alone. The apostle Paul grappled with that one to. Listen and look Romans 9:**14-18** *What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." 18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.* Pharaoh becomes an object lesson in this sermon on God's sovereign election. We see here why God hardened Pharaoh - in order that He would receive glory through his humiliation and destruction. And verse 18 asserts the rights of God to harden men if he chooses. But, you ask, how can God then find fault? Good question. It's in the next verse in Romans **19-20** *You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? God did not choose to reveal to us the deep mysteries of his counsel. He did choose to remind us of our place. Who are you, oh man, to answer back to God?*

Ultimately then I can't solve all the puzzles surrounding this but I do want you to understand that in hardening the heart of Pharaoh God was acting judicially and punishing the Egyptian king. This is what we may call judicial hardening. To explain: when man sins he loses all rights before a holy God, but often, God, in His mercy, sends His word to these sinners through some human instrument. He sends light into a world deserving darkness and what do men do with the light? They cover their faces. Even the brilliance of the Son of God comes into the world and the lovers of darkness nail him to a tree. Now, when man rejects the gracious gift of God what does God do? He

judges their rejection - how? By blinding them further. God says, *You stubborn people want darkness? I'll give you darkness. You won't open your heart to me, then I'll close your heart forever.* For those who reject God's light this is the penalty - they become increasingly hardened in their sin. In Romans chapter 1 you can see the progression of judicial hardening and the justice of God in it. **18-19** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,*¹⁹ *because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.* Pharaoh said, "I don't know the Lord" but that wasn't altogether true was it? Deep down, every man knows something of His maker. **20-21** *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.*²¹ *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.* Paul says that men know God, they have light, but what do they do with it? Do they live by it? No, they reject it. They suppress the truth and block it out. **22-24** *Professing to be wise, they became fools,*²³ *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.*²⁴ *Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.* The first word of that verse says, "therefore." Therefore, because they turned away from Him God gives them over. That is the same as hardening. God doesn't have to do anything to harden us He just lets us go our way, gives us over to our own corruption. His reason **25-27** *For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*²⁶ *For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,*²⁷ *and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.* The judgment of God on sin is more sin. God takes away just laws, and warnings and the restraint of conscience. It may seem that immoral people are having fun but only because God has completely removed their moral light. They do not see the hell they are in. **28** *And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.* A calloused heart and a depraved mind. This is where sin leads and this is the hardening work of a sovereign holy God.

So, it should be pretty obvious that God has the upper hand in this clash with Pharaoh don't you think? I mean it would be pretty ridiculous to oppose Someone who can control even your heart wouldn't it? But such is the pride of Pharaoh. Such is the arrogance of man in the full brazenness of his rebellion against God. Puny pharaoh, sitting on his Egyptian throne shakes his fist at the Almighty and says, "Who is Jehovah?" Now, I may not have a throne to sit on, or a scepter to shake, but I see myself in Pharaoh. I see embodied in him the same pride that lives in the breast of every man, woman, boy and girl. The same pride that says, "Who is the Lord to tell me what to do, to tell me how to spend my money, to tell me how to spend my time, to tell me how to handle my urges and my relationships and my body." Uh-uh, Jesus, don't you go sending a Moses or any other preacher in here telling me how to rule my life. I am on the throne of my life! I am the king in control! I am the captain of my fate! Who are we kidding? Fellow Bambis, learn a lesson from Pharaoh.

5:2ab *But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? Pharaoh was going to find out wasn't he? God was about to say, "Pharaoh, let me introduce myself." Three plagues later Pharaoh was asking Moses to pray for him and ten plagues later he was a broken, beaten, desperate man. He was humiliated by God because he would not humble himself. He was broken by the Lord because he hardened his heart. Now, wait a second - I thought God hardened his heart. There is more to see about this folks, because Exodus not only says God hardened Pharaoh's heart it also says Pharaoh hardened Pharaoh's heart. 8:15* *But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.* After the plague of insects it says **32** *But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.* You know what it means to harden your heart don't you? It's like when the neighbor kid comes to your house and offers to sell you 80 cents worth of candy for five dollars and she stands there looking so hopeful that you will help her with her school project but you, good steward that you are, stiffen your will, shut down the bowels of compassion and say, "No, God bless you, now get off my porch." That is hardening your heart. It means a refusal to let the plea or the need of another penetrate your emotional shields. Sometimes, like in my example, that can be a good thing, but when you respond that way to God and His messengers you are in major trouble. Pharaoh did it over and again. Exodus 9:**34-35** *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.*³⁵ *Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.* God was putting enormous pressure on Pharaoh wasn't he? God was

turning up the heat but Pharaoh was like clay not like wax. When the heat came he didn't melt he grew hard.

Let's talk about why Pharaoh was so resistant to God's word. What motivated him to harden his heart? The text doesn't say this but we can easily conjecture that one thing which influenced him was the financial repercussions of his decision. If Pharaoh had given in to Moses it would have hurt him and his people financially. He would have lost his slave labor force. Does anything in American history sound similar to you? Wasn't it a concern for the financial interests of the old south that hardened the hearts of so many against the emancipation of negro slaves? Human beings can resist the most persuasive appeals to logic and emotion when the almighty dollar is at stake. We all know that if you want to touch someone at a sensitive point, try the wallet. We try to avoid anything that might pull our money from us. And sometimes that is good, often we have to do that to resist the pressure of salesmen and solicitors but we have to make sure we don't close down to the Lord. Some of you right here have never made a full commitment of your heart to Jesus because you are afraid of how it will impact you financially. "If I make Jesus my Lord, he may tell me to give lots of money to the church!" And you love your money more than Christ so you harden your heart. I'm not interested in your money but I do care about your heart and I urge you to care more about your soul than you do about your bank account. The love of money will shipwreck your soul and keep you, like Pharaoh, from knowing God.

The second motivation Pharaoh had to harden his heart was a concern for his own reputation. Pharaoh was the ruling monarch, a man of unquestioned authority and he probably didn't like the way it would look if Moses could have his way with him. Pharaoh had an image to maintain. I thought as well of two other rulers in the Bible. There was a governor named Felix who sat as a judge over Paul and listened to Paul speak for some time and look at what it says about him Acts 24:**24-25** *Some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.* ²⁵ *But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you."* What was happening with Felix? He was starting to believe Paul wasn't he? The word of God was starting to penetrate his psychological defenses and it scared him. If he became a Christian what would happen to him? He would lose his position, he would lose his prestige so he sent Paul away. Later Paul appeared before a higher court, before a man called King Agrippa who also heard Paul out and said afterward 26:**28** *Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."* The King James Version says,

“Almost thou persuadest me.”[®] But not quite Paul. Agrippa was moved but was able to harden his heart enough to avoid faith and its negative impact on his reputation. After all, these men had an image to maintain. What about you? Some of you have resisted the word of God, you have said no to the Spirit of God time and again because you are afraid that a radical commitment to Christ Jesus will destroy your carefully cultivated image. Why you might get so caught up in Jesus that you raise your hands when you sing - and what will people think? Or you might start witnessing to friends and they could get turned off and think you are a Jesus freak. Or Jesus might tell you to get rid of your TV and when your family comes over they will have nothing to do and what will they think? God forbid that you should risk such embarrassment just to avoid an eternity in hell. Why the wrath of God is a little thing but your reputation is big! Is that your conclusion! God forbid! God have mercy on us!

Take a minute with me now and look at the consequences of hardening your heart when the Lord speaks. Did Pharaoh win this war against God? Where did Pharaoh end up? He ended up with his nation in financial ruin, his army in the Red Sea and his oldest son in the grave. Pharaoh became the poster boy for Proverbs 29:1 *A man who hardens his neck after much reproof Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.* Also 28:14 *How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.* Pharaoh's story is meant for our instruction. What an example! I think too of the Old South and the awful price the southern states, and really the entire nation, paid because we said *no* to the voice of reason. We said, “No” to our conscience. We said, “No” to the word of God. When you harden yourself against the word of God and knowingly turn away from it, disaster is ahead. Guaranteed, because God promises to oppose the proud! God promises to judge the arrogant! We speak of individuals who break the law, but there is a sense in which no one breaks the law of God. When you violate God's law you don't break it, it breaks you. Gordon MacDonald writes about a battleship that was out at night in a patchy fog when the lookout spied a light ahead. The captain feared they were on a dangerous collision course with another ship and so signaled ahead, “We are on a collision course, advise you change course 20 degrees.” Back came a signal, “Advisable for you to change course 20 degrees.” The captain then sent this message, “I'm a captain, change course 20 degrees.” The reply came back, “I'm a seaman, second class. You had better change your course 20 degrees.” By that time the captain was furious and sent out another message which said, “I'm a battleship. Change course 20 degrees.” Back came the flashing light which said, “I'm a lighthouse.” Guess who changed course? Some of us are as proud as a battleship, but when we run up against God we are no match. God is like that

lighthouse - He aint movin! God's law doesn't change and He's not going to make exceptions for you. We either follow orders or make shipwreck of our lives.

So, the moral of our story is: Hebrews 3:**7-8a** *as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me,* To put it in positive language, what you need to do is to humble yourself ®. I Peter 5:**5d-6** *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.* When you harden your heart and cling to your pride then God is against you, but when you humble yourself God is with you and for you. Understand that there is a difference between being humbled by God and humbling yourself. This distinction was first pointed out to me by a fellow pastor. We were discussing a man whose vibrant ministry had been wrecked, partly due to the man's own sin, and someone noted how God was really humbling him through this, when my friend said, "yes God is humbling him, but will he humble himself?" And there is a huge difference. God humbled Pharaoh through the miracles of Moses but did Pharaoh ever humble himself? Never. 10:**3** *Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 9:**17** Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go.* And because Pharaoh never humbled himself the humiliation sent from God got greater and greater and greater until Pharaoh was a beaten, broken, bloodied man. Get the message - we all will either humble ourselves or be humiliated. We will bow willingly before King Jesus or our knees will be broken. I'm speaking here in the ultimate sense of eternal judgment but this spiritual law enters our present experience as well. You and I frequently face the decision to embrace pride or humility. When in an argument at work or in the family, are we open to the notion that "I" may be wrong. When your mutual pride lands you and your spouse in a game of relational chicken and there is no way to have peace with your spouse and keep your pride are you prepared to be the one who backs down, who humbles yourself, who says, "I have failed." Most marital problems I know of are not complicated. It's a matter of two people, or even just one choosing to be soft instead of hard. That choice can be so painful! But I have never made it when I didn't see God keep His promise to exalt the one who humbles himself. This is a great little book. I forget who gave it to me. It's called, "Tough Talk To A Stubborn Spouse" and its addressed to persons considering divorce. It has 61 short chapters all of which deal with different reasons people give for divorce. And in each one he shows that the pain of the divorce is worse than the problem itself, and the constant solution is to get back in the relationship and humble yourself. Now hey... please hear me. Some believers have chosen divorce

with entire legitimacy. I grant that and don't wish to inflict accusation against such a choice but I do wish to come out strongly against the pride that lies behind most of our relational discord.

I offer you a very lengthy quote, but hang with me and brace yourself. Author Stephen Schwambach writes: *It comes down to this: Which is it going to be – your partner or your pride? You can't have it both ways; sooner or later you will be forced to choose. In the final analysis, being your own person while belonging to somebody else will prove to be mutually exclusive. We have millions of formerly married people whose example you can follow. When push comes to shove, they kept their own priorities: In the spirit of this triumphant age in which we live, they made the heroic decision to lose their mates and keep their pride. They took their stand, they issued their ultimatums, and they stuck to their guns. They hired their lawyers, they won their settlements, and they fought for who gets custody of the children on December 25. Pride is precious isn't it? It's so good to cuddle up next to on a frigid winter's night when your feet are cold. And pride's a wonderful companion, along with you and your newspaper while dining at your favorite restaurant. The really neat thing about it is that pride has all the fulfilling, satisfying, perfect answers when your children look at you with those big eyes brimming with tears and ask why you left. Yeah, pride's the greatest. Can't beat it with a stick. Pride will help you escape from that big, noisy messy house you now live in so you can break loose and start experiencing the good life in some nice, quiet, small, quiet, clean, quiet apartment. And pride can fix it so no one will be telling you what to do anymore. No one will be bugging you about getting your work done around the house. No one will be putting you down. no one will be hassling you about coming home late. No one will be asking you where you've been. You can drag in at any wee hour you like, thanks to pride. And no one will even care one little bit. No one at all.*

God opposes the proud and supports the one who humbles himself. This is the great need in every relationship of life: with your spouse and your kids, and your boss and your employees and your neighbors and your friends at church. Most of all this is needed as we relate to God. Will you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and be lifted up by that strong, kind hand? Or will you harden your heard and be humbled by His might? Look at Pharaoh and learn. Let's pray