

**Series: God Saves #1450**

**Title: Romans 8.29b, 9.17-18; Exodus 4, 7, 8, 9,  
Look for God!**

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Sometimes when we read the Bible, if we are not careful, we can lose sight of God. Let me say that again: sometimes when we read the Bible, if we are not careful, we can lose sight of God. Now that may seem like an odd thing to say. We know, even people critical of the Bible know, that this Book is about God. He authored it for us so that we will know His will in all things, and that by knowing His will we will know *Him*. The Bible presents God to us as He is. Not as we would like Him to be, but for who He actually *is*.

And yet sometimes, and especially in certain narrative sections of this inerrant and inspired text, we can get so caught up in people and in circumstance, even place, that we forget God is acting out His purposes. He wants us to see Him doing something, but we are too focused on what the men and women in the narrative are up to. And one of the best examples of this is these chapters before us this week in the second Book of the Bible, Exodus. Part of our problem here too is that we think we know the story well enough that we do not have to read it again closely. We love this story – Moses, his brother Aaron, the staff, Pharaoh, the Egyptian dynasty, the Nile River, armies, massive and massive amounts of Israelites, the confrontation between God and Pharaoh.

And then eventually the ancient Jews on the move, en masse, departing Egypt when they get to the Sea only to look back and see Pharaoh and his chariots sprinting towards them. Moses raises his hands and, in one of the Bible's many miracles (perhaps the one we like the best) the sea waters part and in between the two walls of water the Israelites and their caravans walk on through. Pharaoh and the Egyptians enter the walled off sea as well, only to have God move the water and they are killed. Oh, there is so much action. Kids love this story, too. We read it to them at bedtime and it inspires their young imaginations, perhaps unlike the other Bible stories we tell them.

Ah yes, that is all well and good. But in reading this text, in re-telling it to others, do we also emphasize where God is and what God is doing? Even those who study the Bible for a living, those who write about what they know of the text, Bible commentators, including some theologians *can* miss God if they are not careful. So let me show you what I mean, because in this example we have a mistake many make and we want to make sure we do not repeat the error.

As Dr. John Piper correctly points out in his excellent and insightful book *Providence*, Bible commentators say God only hardened Pharaoh's heart *after* Pharaoh had already twice hardened his own heart. From this they infer that God's hardening is the effect of Pharaoh's self-hardening. Here is what they do. They begin with Exodus chapter 8. In Exodus 8, verse 15, well let me just read this. **"When Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the Lord had said."** This was after the plague of frogs had passed. Having survived the plague, Pharaoh insisted God's people could not leave. He hardened his own heart against God.

Then, Exodus 8, verse 32 is read. Exodus 8.32 says, **"Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go."** This statement was made after the plague of flies. That was the fourth plague that we read about on Monday of this week. So we have twice in Exodus 8 when Pharaoh hardens *his own heart*. Then, in Exodus chapter 9 for the first time since the beginning of the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh, the Bible says this. I am reading Exodus 9, verse 12, **"And the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart..."** Now the Lord takes action. He hardens Pharaoh's heart.

OK, say most commentators, from this we learn that, yes, God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, *but* that was *after* Pharaoh hardened his own heart. The order is that Pharaoh hardened his heart, and *then* God in response to what Pharaoh has already done, hardens it some more. This makes it seem that God is only responding to Pharaoh. But this is wrong. It is a mis-reading of the entire situation. Why?

Because we have to take into account Exodus 4 and 7, chapters that well precede chapters 8 and 9. Exodus 4.21, **“The Lord said to Moses, ‘I will harden his heart...”** Exodus 7.3, **“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart...”** I trust you see that when we read God’s Word in order, and when we *see God* in the text, then we know that God’s hardening is not a mere response to Pharaoh’s hardening. It is actually the other way around: Pharaoh’s hardening is a response to God’s hardening! This was God’s plan from the beginning, as I am about to demonstrate to you in further detail.

But first, let me point out what I was saying at the beginning. Do you see what can happen, even among the most seasoned Bible students among us, when we get fixated on the drama in the contest between Moses and Pharaoh. We run the risk of misunderstanding because we have failed to notice, and take seriously, what God has already committed Himself to do in the Egyptian ruler’s heart. Ah, we may miss it, but Moses did not. Moses understood this. Let me prove it to you.

First a quotation from John Piper and then Scripture. Piper writes, “[What] is absolutely crucial to see is that Moses (author of Exodus) refers back to the promise [of Exodus 4.21, “I will harden his heart.”] four times as he describes Pharaoh’s hardening. In other words, four times Moses tells us that the hardening is happening ‘as the LORD had said.’ And it is all-important to remember what, in fact, the LORD had said when it says ‘as the LORD had said.’ What [God] said was ‘I will harden his heart.’ [God] had *not* said, ‘He will harden his own heart.’ Here are four occurrences of ‘as the LORD had said.’ (*Providence*, 438).” End quote.

Let’s look at these together. Before the first plague, Exodus 7, verse 13, **“Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.”** After the first plague, Exodus 7, verse 22, **“Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.”** After the second plague, Exodus 8, verse 15, **“When Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.”** And after the third plague, Exodus 8, verse 19, **“Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.”**

Do you hear it, brothers and sisters? “As the Lord had said, As the Lord had said, As the Lord had said, As the Lord had said...” Moses, writing the Exodus after his own, personal experience in the exodus clearly connects God hardening Pharaoh to Pharaoh hardening himself. Let me quote John Piper again, “The point is this: whether it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8.15) or that his heart ‘was hardened’ (8.19) in each case the hardening is happening ‘as the LORD had said.’ And what [the Lord] said was, ‘I will harden Pharaoh’s heart.’ This means that behind the ‘self-hardening’ and behind the ‘being hardened’ were the plan and purpose of God to harden. God’s hardening is not described as a response to what Pharaoh does. It’s the other way around. What Pharaoh does - his self-hardening - is described as the effect of what God does (*Providence*, 439).” Close quote.

The plan and purpose of God is what we really need to grasp! What God is doing in hardening Pharaoh’s heart leads to the salvation of God’s people from the hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. And this is what the Apostle Paul’s point is over in Romans chapter 9 that we will go back to next week, beginning on Monday. I have not forgotten that the whole point of our visit to Exodus is to speak about the other side of predestination - that is, what is meant by double predestination.

OK, I trust this has been helpful and clarifying. We have seen God and His Word to Moses *before* the encounter, that He will harden Pharaoh’s heart. *Then*, in the confrontation, Pharaoh hardens his own heart. Can I make a recommendation? This broadcast and podcast included a lot of Scripture and quotations. Go to [godisministry.org](http://godisministry.org), click on today’s podcast and download the transcript by pressing “Read Along.” Then, listen to this again *as you read the transcript*. I think that will be helpful for you. [Godisministry.org](http://Godisministry.org). And then join us on Monday for God Is!

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