

Exod 03-04-16a

Let's prepare ourselves for the study of the Word of God this evening by taking a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank you that you have the power to take the common clay of which we are made and transform us into vessels of honor that are useful in your service, that fulfill a purpose and an assigned function. We thank you that you have entered us into your plan, you have entered us into your family, you have united us with your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have a new outlook, new opportunities, new potential because of his faithfulness and his work on our behalf on the cross. And in this week where we look forward to the celebration of his resurrection, we thank you that we are the beneficiaries of your grace and of his work on the cross. And because of that, we have a bright hope for the future and a wonderful life in the present.

We ask your blessing on us as we study your word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will find our hearts ready and compliant, that the soil will be fertile in which the seed is sown so that it will bear fruit that reflects your glory and accomplishes the purpose for which you have sent it to us. We pray all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, we find ourselves once again in Exodus chapter 7. There has been a two-fold manifestation of the messengers of God. They came first to God's own people, to Israel, and were authenticated by signs.

Their message is validated by these supernatural markers. Those same markers first authenticated the message from God to Moses himself at the bush, and then provide sort of an ID card or an identification and an authentication for Moses and Aaron as they go before the people. Now, those same marks of divine commission and divine authorization have been shown.

Those credentials have been shown to the Egyptian leadership. And, of course, they seek to counterfeit those credentials and that authentic presence. They say, well, we have gods and we have power and we are at least the equal of your God, if not the superior.

And if you step back, we know the story so well of the Exodus and of the plagues and of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. But if you think about the way God implemented it, if you were going to be God for a moment, you got your own planet, had your own people, they ended up in bondage for a few hundred years, and you were going to deliver them, and you were going to set up a plan of manifesting yourself to them and to their enemies. There are lots of different things that you could do, aren't there? Lots of different miracles, lots of different plagues, lots of different kinds of authentication that you might use.

Various times and various occasions throughout Scripture, God has done different things. Sometimes he uses fire and takes the top off of a mountain, such as he did with Elijah at Mount

Carmel. Other times there is thunder and lightning and a thick cloud over a mountain, such as Mount Sinai.

Other times he walks in in the form of a man, as he did with Abraham and the two companions right before the Sodom and Gomorrah. Oh, by the way, there was a fascinating program on TV about Sodom and Gomorrah. I don't know if you saw it.

Well, I normally would not have seen it, but I was visiting people that had cable. I believe it might have been the Discovery Channel or one of these channels. There were a couple of archaeologists that went over and were digging around the southern edge of the Dead Sea and were finding this destruction layer of these towns and saw where these two towns had been destroyed by fire.

They have different names. The names sound nothing like Sodom and Gomorrah, but they were speculating, well, how could this have happened? Why were they never rebuilt? How closely did it conform to the biblical account? It was quite fascinating. It seems the longer science has to dig and to draw conclusions, the more ready they are to recognize that the Bible really is an accurate historical record.

Initially they poo-poo it and say, oh, it couldn't have happened. Then the more they dig and the more they analyze, and as their methods are refined, they wind up having to come back and say, well, you know, that earlier conclusion was wrong. Dame Kenyon, what was her name, Kathleen Kenyon, was an archaeologist back in the first part of the 20th century and the latter part of the 19th maybe.

She dug around and decided that Jericho had never happened and that the walls didn't fall down. She poo-pooed it and said, oh, this, that, and the other. Subsequently, with advances in science, they've gone back and found that, yes, the walls did fall outward and it was destroyed in a single day.

Her conclusions were off because she only excavated a portion of the city. She was in an area where erosion had taken away the evidence that one corner of the city was on a hillside and because of weathering and erosion, the evidence had been washed away. These other guys went and excavated the other three sides of the city and here were the walls laying out and here was the destruction layer.

It was all just the way the Bible says. It's amusing to see how we stumble along and the wisdom of men is foolishness with God. We find that the biblical record is authenticated time and again.

Here, you have people in Egypt and God comes to them. Some of them are his people, some of them are pagans. How does God reveal himself? Why did God choose to do things the way that he has done here? I would like to offer you a couple of thoughts in that regard because God is consistent and he emphasizes the same things to us today that he did back then.

One is, who is the most receptive? Who has the most potential for faith? Moses is not a great

man of faith at the point that God comes to him, any more than Gideon, threshing the wheat indoors, trying to hide from the Philistines, is a great man of faith. But God sends the angel. Remember that story of Gideon? He sends the angel of the Lord and he says, Hail, oh mighty man of valor! Gideon is skulking, trying to thresh the wheat.

He looks like a surreptitious little conniving guy inside the barn there trying to thresh against the edict of the Philistines. But he is hailed as a mighty man of valor. Why? Because God looks at us not in terms of our accomplishments, not in terms of our talent, but in terms of our potential in the realm of faith.

And God blesses us and God provides for us, not on the basis of what we have done, but on the basis of what he can do through us because he knows what we are capable of in the area of faith. And it is a great example of optimism, if you will, that God doesn't hold our past and our failures and our current state of weakness against us. He says, you know, I can take you and make something out of you.

I can take a Gideon, or I can take Moses, or I can take Joseph down in prison. And because we are willing to exercise faith, we are willing to express confidence in God's word and in God's plan, God can do great things. And it is all of grace.

There is a book by that name, All of Grace. And what it requires of us is the willingness to express faith. It may not be visible.

Not many mighty are called. God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. And when God first addresses us and approaches us, we may look foolish.

We may look like the Israelites in slavery. We may, you know, what potential do you see in a beaten down people who spend their time stamping straw into mud to make bricks? It doesn't look like there are the makings of the greatest nation in human history in those humble beginnings. But God looks and sees that here is a people that he will put his presence in the midst.

He will give his word. He will make them the custodians and the stewards of the oracles of God. This is the place from which his glory is going to shine forth.

And ultimately, you're going to have the kingdom of David and of Solomon. And ultimately, you will have the kingdom of David's greater son, headquartered in Jerusalem, springing forth. The Messiah himself is going to come from these people.

But it's a very unpromising beginning. When we look at ourselves and we say, well, I'm a very unpromising beginning. It doesn't look like there's any great noise that is going to be occurring in my vicinity.

But do not underestimate the Lord God. So with that in mind, that's a great little platitude to say, but in practical terms, what does it mean? Well, it means this. When the message of God

comes to us like it comes to Israel through Moses and Aaron, we have got to have the alertness to respond.

We need to have the gumption, the spiritual intestinal fortitude, if you will, to latch on to the word of God and cling to it. It's so discouraging that when Moses and Aaron come and begin to explain the plan and the purpose of God in delivering the Israelites from bondage, that their lot in life grows worse. Their circumstances deteriorate.

Their conditions go from bad to worse. And God knew that this would happen. God made no effort to ameliorate the hardship that Pharaoh put on the Israelites once Moses and Aaron showed up on the scene.

And it's a test. And the same thing will happen to you and me. When we begin to move and gain some momentum in our spiritual life, and we say, I am going to commit myself to God's way.

I'm going to walk those paths of righteousness. I'm going to let God lead me for His namesake in those paths. You can expect, you can count on it.

Opposition is going to spring up. There's going to be friction. There's going to be resistance.

There's going to be opposition. There's going to be hardship. There's going to be criticism.

There's going to be naysayers and non-well-wishers who will come in and begin to crow like the raven over the door. Nevermore. What are you doing? You're wrong.

You're unwise. You look at our president trying to accomplish the objectives for which we sent our military into Iraq. How many people wake up in the morning knowing that there are millions of people around the world actively criticizing and opposing? They're trying to get their job done.

I mean, that's a very discouraging thing. We've got to have some spiritual guts, and I don't know any other way to say it. We just have to have some guts, and we base our confidence on the rock.

We build our house on the rock. The Lord Jesus Christ is the rock, and we build our house on that rock. He doesn't say you build your house on the rock, and it was such a great location.

The weather is always balmy, and there's never a crosswind. He says the reason you build your house on the rock is because the storm is coming, and the rain and the wind are going to beat on your house. And that's what's happening here.

The rain and the wind are beating on this house that's being built, the house of Israel. And when deliverance comes, it initially looks like things have gotten worse. Well, we can expect that the words of the Lord Jesus will be true in our life as well.

In this world ye shall have tribulation. Just plan on it. Count on it.

Expect it. Be pleasantly surprised if you avoid it. Because it's coming, and it's for our good.

What does this do? Think about the Israelites who decide that they're going to trust God, and they're going to go with the plan as expressed through Moses and Aaron anyway. Even though things are going from bad to worse, they're going to commit. You see analogies over in the Middle East with people who had to kind of put their life on the line and had to decide which side they would choose.

Are you going to stick with the regime? Are you going to see that there's a wind of change blowing and commit and put yourself out a little bit for this new potential? That's what we are called to do. And what does it do? When it is fulfilled, think about the confidence of those Israelites who chose to trust God. They're going to choose to put the blood on the lintels of their homes.

They're going to choose to march out of Egypt. They're going to have fear when they get backed up against the Red Sea, but there's going to be deliverance. And this is designed to build our confidence and to build our experience with God's provision and with God's plan and with God's purpose, and we should look at it as an opportunity to be impressed by God.

We're going to see a phrase in our passage tonight that says that. So now in Exodus chapter 7, just to summarize that point, why are we getting this long introduction? The narrative slows down and goes to a close-up of Moses at the bush and Moses coming back to the people and Moses meeting his brother and Moses going before the people and Moses talking to God again. Are you sure, Lord? Are you sure you don't need somebody just a little more eloquent? What's God's point? It doesn't have anything to do with Moses' eloquence.

It has everything to do with God's plan and God's purpose. And it is so much the more that Moses is not an eloquent speaker because nobody is ever going to look back and say, well, you know, that silver-tongued devil Moses, he just bewitched the Pharaoh and got the people turned loose. Isn't Moses great? People are going to look back and say, the Lord God, with a mighty hand, brought his people out of bondage.

And that's the way we should look at our salvation. This is a giant picture of individual salvation, isn't it? Do we get saved because some wonderful oration took place or someone in gilded tones presented the gospel or someone scared us with hellfire and brimstone? Is it the speaker who delivers the message that sways us and accomplishes our deliverance? It's not at all. You can write the gospel on a bathroom wall.

You can scrawl it on the back of a matchbook. It's the power of God that delivers us. It's the power of God and the grace of God that saves us.

And it depends on God. It doesn't depend on us. We have to fasten ourselves to God in faith.

We have to cling to God in faith. And when the storms come and when the opposition comes, people start saying nay and opposition rears its head. We lash ourselves to the mast of God's promises and God's character and God's desire to benefit us.

It has to be real to us. It has to be more real than our circumstances. This is the lesson in Exodus chapter 6 and Exodus chapter 7. And that's the background for what we have here.

We've already seen in the first 12 verses of Exodus chapter 7 having authenticated the message and the mission to Moses at the bush, having authenticated the messenger with his message and mission to the people via these signs, now he goes to Pharaoh and he says, look, it's time for you to recognize that the jig is up. The time of slavery for the people of Israel is over and you can either conform yourself to the manifest destiny that God has declared for Israel or you are going to be rolled over by it. You can come quietly or we can do violence to you.

It's one or the other. And God knows that Pharaoh is going to have a hard heart, that the Egyptians are not going to countenance the loss of their workforce. So God is going to use this occasion to not only deliver Israel but also make an illustration that is going to stand for all of the ages to come about the defeat of sin and the defeat of the man of sin, the prince of the power of the air, Lucifer, the son of darkness.

And so we have this initial authentication to Pharaoh that this is not just somebody with a great idea, somebody with an ambitious plan or a lot of optimistic hopes for the Hebrews. This is someone with a directive and an edict from God. So you have the episode of the rods being thrown down and the serpents back and forth.

We talked a little bit about the vocabulary there and about how the words, it's not just Nahash, which is the word for snake, but it's the word that is used for a cobra, for a snake that could be charmed. And these snakes were worshipped in Egypt. You have the Tanin and the Peten, which is the word for asp, is parallel to this.

You have a couple of passages if you want to make a note. Over in Deuteronomy 32, 33, it's talking about the evil ones and it says their wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of cobras. And you have this word Tanin poetically paralleled with Peten, which is the word for a cobra or an asp, such as Cleopatra is famous for.

Same thing over in Psalm 91, 13. You have Tanin and Peten. It says, you shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent.

You shall trample underfoot. And this is symbolic of dominance over evil, victory over sin. Going back to that archetype in the garden, of course.

The Septuagint in translating Exodus here uses the word Dracon, D-R-A-K-O-N, which is our English word dragon comes from that, a general term for a snake-like creature. And that's how the Septuagint translators working 200 or 300 years before Christ translated this Tanin, T-A-N-I-N, or actually T-A-N-N-I-N. It's got a dogish in it.

So there was sort of a sect or a club, sort of a guild, if you will, of people who were snake charmers in Egypt going back hundreds of years called the Sili, P-S-Y-L-L-I. And their stock in trade was conforming these snakes to their will. And their origins are lost in the mists of antiquity.

But for centuries and centuries they have worked this trick of snakes into sticks, sticks into snakes, and this sort of thing, going all the way back to the Janus and Jamberus here before Pharaoh. And these men were not just tricksters. They weren't just magicians.

They were counselors and wise men. And their credibility was enhanced because they were supposedly messengers from the gods of Egypt. And so what you have going on here is a battle of authentication.

Who is Pharaoh going to listen to, his wise men with their authentication or the prophet of God with his authentication? So you get the idea that whoever pulls out the bigger cannon here is going to win the day in terms of who should be listened to. And this is the same kind of battle that is fought in our culture and in our Christian world today. Who should we listen to? Who should we trust and decide that they are bringing the message of God? You have people who go up on stages and knock people in the head and claim that they are healed.

You have people who pull rhetorical rabbits out of a hat and who can sway people with emotions. Even if it's not a miracle ministry or it's not a charismatic ministry, there are people who with their rhetoric and with the beauty of their language send people on a little journey every time they develop a sermon or present a message. And it is the experience of listening to the person and their working a wonder.

And if you come away impressed by the delivery, if it is a triumph of form, then people assign more credence to the substance. And so when you think back to Moses and Aaron versus Janus and Jambres, two on two here, I've got my rods and snakes, you've got your rods and snakes. Who does Pharaoh listen to? He listens to his own.

And we are going to see a pattern as we go through the plagues where Pharaoh begins to sway a little bit but then his men come up with a trick and he says, Ah, well, okay, I can stick with my guys, I can stick with my wise men. And we end up being deceived in the same way today. If you do not recognize the actual authentication of God, God honors his own word.

It is not how emotional do I feel. It is not do my three wishes get granted. I went to this new church and right away I got a new washing machine.

I needed a washing machine for so long. I went to this new church and Monday morning, bing, there's a washing machine on my back. I actually heard somebody tell this story one time on the radio.

That was Reverend Ike up in Tulsa. You can't lose with the stuff I use. And he was telling a story about how somebody started listening to him and hadn't had a washer in a long time.

Came in to listen to Reverend Ike and plunked some money in the plate. The very next day, brand new washing machines right there on the back porch. What is genuine authentication? If you're looking for the truth, you have to recognize where God authenticates his message and God honors his own word.

If you're hungry for the word, you'll recognize it when you hear it and nothing else will satisfy. It's not an experience. It's not a miracle.

It is sinking our teeth into the meat of God's word, seeing its transforming power in our souls in a genuine, meaningful, and lasting way. Not a little emotional high from singing around the campfire. Not a high from going to the cantata at the church or having someone who's clever with words raise us up on a wave of emotion.

It's the day-by-day, consistent building of the foundation in our soul that gives us power over sin. Where that rod thrown down by Aaron consumes the snakes that represent the power of Egypt, the gods of Egypt. You know that God's word is benefiting you when you have power to flee temptation, power over sin, breaking free of sinful patterns, breaking free of sinful thoughts, breaking free of sinful behaviors.

There is only one power in the universe that can free us from the shackles of sin and that is God's power. God's power comes into our life through his word and through his spirit. So, that's what's going on here.

When you see those rods being thrown down, who should Pharaoh listen to? He ought to tell when those snakes are consumed that a greater power has arrived on the scene and it's available to him. But of course he doesn't see it. So now we get down to verse 14 in Dex.

7 So the Lord said to Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hard. He refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning when he goes out to the water and you shall stand by the river's bank to meet him and the rod which was turned to a serpent you shall take in your hand.

Which rod is this? How many rods are in view? We talked about this last time. There is one rod. The rod that Moses carried all those years in Midian.

The rod that he cast down before the burning bush is the same rod that he has handed to his brother Aaron. It's the same. There is one rod all the way through this story.

It's the rod. It is the staff of Moses. This same staff, the one that was turned to a serpent, it turned to a serpent.

That rod has been back and forth between a serpent and a rod three or four times now, hasn't it? Happened at the bush. Happened in front of the Israelites. Happened in front of Pharaoh.

Swallowed up several other snakes. Might be a little thicker now than it was before. It says take that one out in your hand.

You shall say to him, The Lord God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness. But indeed, until now you would not hear. This basically means you would not listen.

You would not heed. Thus says the Lord, By this you shall know that I am the Lord. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood.

And the fish that are in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, Say to Aaron, Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and in pitchers of stone.

And Moses and Aaron did so just as the Lord commanded. Well, let's go back up to the beginning here. He says, Pharaoh's heart is hard.

He refuses to let the people go. Before each of these manifestations of divine power, there is a message delivered to Pharaoh, and there is the opportunity to make a decision. All of Reformed and Calvinist theology notwithstanding, God faces people with a choice.

Choice is the issue. And the fact that Moses and Aaron go and confront Pharaoh, they didn't even have to go tell Pharaoh. It was a foregone conclusion.

Why didn't the plagues just rain down on the people? Why talk to Pharaoh at all? He's predestined unto destruction. His people are predestined to destruction. They're not going to listen.

God knows it ahead of time. Why even talk to him? Why not just run through the list of plagues, beat the people down, and walk out? Because choice is an issue. Everyone gets the message.

Everyone gets the chance to choose. We are accountable for our choice. We had an interesting discussion last night, actually on the break between lessons.

It was a very excellent question that was asked. A lot of times people are diagnosed, they have behavioral problems, and they go to the doctor, and the doctor says, well, you've got a chemical imbalance. There are reasons why you behave the way you do.

You've got some goofy hormones and some strange chemical levels in your brain, and this is why you are prone to fits and uncontrollable rages in one thing or another. And the question is, does this let someone off the hook when it comes to response to God? And when you look at the God of justice and the God of righteousness in the Bible, it is hard to think that God would victimize someone with a condition that made it impossible for them to exercise choice. And I believe, and with all respect for people who do find themselves in this situation and have to deal with it, that is an issue that everyone has to face.

But I will tell you that science, just like the archaeologists are catching up, scientists and psychologists are now publishing papers, and it is very unpopular because in the same way that archaeologists built their reputation on the old Egyptian chronology, that turned out to not be true, and they refused to admit it because it threw all their life's work away, there are many psychologists and psychiatrists who refuse to acknowledge the new studies that are coming out indicating that a lot of the imbalances and weird serotonin levels and all the rest of this that they are treating with Paxil and all these other medicines are the result of a pattern of decision that was made earlier in life. People willfully engage in patterns of thought and in throwing fits and in going off the deep end and alter their brain chemistry by choice, and you paint yourself into a corner. Now, when you want to straighten up, you can't because it is all the same as someone who abuses a drug and becomes addicted and then decides, well, I don't want to be an addict anymore.

Well, you should have thought of that before you made yourself dependent to where now you don't have much choice. And they are discovering that children can get into this situation of hormone imbalance and chemical imbalance in the brain when they are allowed to rebel and to throw fits and to exercise every whim of their sinful nature without restraint, which is what the Bible has said all along. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but anger rots the bones.

And you can rot your physical plant through unrestrained anger, unrestrained bitterness, destructive thought patterns will change your body chemistry. And science is just now catching up to what the Bible said 2,000 and 3,000 years ago. Well, we are going to pause here and take our break because I want to come back and talk about what happens by the riverside when Moses and Aaron meet Pharaoh on the shores of the Nile.

So that is where we will resume when we come back.