

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Exodus 8:15-10:27 “Responding to the Difficult Commands of God”

(Read 5:1-2; 9:16-17)

Intro. What’s the most difficult command God has given you? It may have been His command to repent of your sin. Jesus said in Lk. 13:3, “unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” Has He told you to give up the sin of immorality? Has He told you to give up pornography? Has He told you to give up the sin of gossip? Has He told you to stop lying? Has He told you to give up the sin of alcohol or drug abuse? Has He told you to give up the sin of gluttony? Has He told you to give up profanity? Once you repent, then you need to start living right. What righteous commands have you found the most difficult? Has God commanded you to tithe or give generously to His work, and you have resisted obeying that command? Has God commanded you to serve Him in some specific way, and you have resisted obeying that command? Has God commanded you to be faithful to your spouse, and yet you feel trapped in a difficult marriage?

We all face times in our lives when God gives us a command that we find very difficult to obey. Pharaoh faced such a time in his life. Moses and Aaron came to him one day and said, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness’” (5:1). This command was repeated to Pharaoh at least 7 more times (7:16; 8:1, 20, 29; 9:1, 13; 10:3). He was later told that they were to be allowed to travel 3 days into the wilderness to worship their God. Pharaoh sized up the situation, and he realized that once they got that far away, they would probably not come back. He would lose a valuable labor force that cost him comparatively little to maintain. In his mind, the God of the Hebrews was asking way too much.

This morning we will see that Pharaoh gives us an example of how we should *not* respond to the difficult commands of God. Even though God is the star of this story, we can also learn some things from Pharaoh. 1 Cor. 10:11 says, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition....” What happened to Israel & others in the Old Testament should serve as a warning to us today. We can avoid making the same mistakes, and we would be wise to do so.

So what should you do when you face a difficult command from God? I want to share with you four things you should not do. First:

## I. DON’T RESPOND WITH PRIDE

Back in chapter 5, v.2, Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?” I can imagine that he put a little emphasis on the word “I.” “Who is the LORD, that *I* should obey His voice....” “I am the great & mighty Pharaoh. I am the most powerful man on earth, feared by multitudes. Who is your little tribal God, that I should obey His voice?” There are other evidences of Pharaoh’s pride in this story. In 9:17 God said to Pharaoh, “As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go.” We can understand why Pharaoh initially exalted himself against the Lord. He was the head of a great & powerful nation, and the Lord had not revealed Himself at *that* point. But by the time we get to chapter 9, v.17, God had sent 6 plagues upon the land that he and his sorcerers were powerless to stop. He knew

the power of the Lord by then, and yet he continued to exalt himself. He still was too proud to humble himself before the God of Israel, and obey His voice. So God sent another plague that manifested the power of God even more. They experienced the most powerful hail and thunderstorm that has ever occurred in Egypt. Think of the worst storm you have ever been in, and multiply that at least 10-fold. Lighting flashed and struck everywhere, causing a number of fires. Thunder roared and even shook the ground. There must have been strong wind as well. As a result, there was “very heavy” hail (v.24). Instead of golf-ball size hail, it must have been more like the size of soccer balls! The storm caused widespread damage. The storm was so severe that it made a stronger impression upon Pharaoh than all the previous plagues. God reminded him of how big He was, & how small Pharaoh was. It did humble him for a moment. It even led him to acknowledge his sin of disobedience to God. He also begged Moses to pray that the storm cease (vv.27-28). He even promised to let the people go (v.28). Yet as soon as the storm ceased, he refused to let God’s people go. How would he look to his people if he gave in? Pride caused him to resist obeying God’s command yet again. Therefore, in 10:3 God said to Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron, “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me.” Once again, God zeroed in on one of the main problems, and that was pride. He was so proud, and he did not feel it necessary to obey God.

Don’t make the mistake the Pharaoh made. Don’t let pride keep you from obeying God. You say, “Yea, but what will my friends think if I turn my life over to God?” You shouldn’t care what your friends think. All that really matters is what God thinks! We need to humble ourselves before the Lord. We need to remember that He made us, saved us, and has the right to tell us what to do. Even when He makes a difficult demand upon our lives, we must humbly acknowledge His authority over our lives.

So when God makes a difficult command, don’t respond with pride. Humble yourself before the Lord. Secondly, based on another mistake Pharaoh made, I would say:

## II. DON’T HARDEN YOUR HEART

When God commands us to do something, we could harden our hearts like Pharaoh did repeatedly. Notice the first clear instance of this beginning in chapter 7, v.13, “And Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said. So the LORD said to Moses: ‘Pharaoh’s heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go.’” Then after the second plague, we read in chapter 8, v.15, “But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the LORD had said.” Then, even after his own sorcerers acknowledge the power of God, we read in v.19, “But Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said.” Likewise, look down to v.32, “But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also; neither would he let the people go.” This was after the 4<sup>th</sup> plague, the plague of the swarms of flying insects. We read of two other times that Pharaoh hardened his heart, and refused to obey God’s command (9:7, 34). That means that Pharaoh hardened his heart at least 6 times.

What does it mean to harden your heart? The Hebrew word literally means that his heart was “heavy” or “weighty” [a similar Hebrew word is used in 9:24). Perhaps the image is of a large, heavy bolder that is hard to move. Pharaoh was stubborn, unmovable. Do you know anyone like that? Or the word means “to make dull, make unresponsive.” Thus, it means to resist God’s command with determination.

The opposite of a hard heart is a heart that fears God, and that reverential fear motivates us to obey the Lord’s commands. This is illustrated in the plague of hail. In God’s mercy He

warned of the plague before it hit. He also told how people and livestock could be spared. He said in v.19, “Therefore send now and gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die.” Now notice what happened in vv.20-21, “He who feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses.<sup>1</sup> But he who did not regard the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field.” Notice that faith leads to works. So instead of hardening your heart against the Lord’s command, you should fear the Lord, and obey His voice.

Let me warn you why you should be careful not to harden your heart. When you do so, you are more likely to harden your heart the next time. Each act of disobedience only hardened Pharaoh’s heart more. The plagues became more intense, and yet Pharaoh hardened his heart even in the face of overwhelming power and judgment. You even open yourself up to the possibility of being hardened by God Himself as a judgment upon your previous rejections of His will upon your life. After the plague of the boils, we read for the first time in 9:12, “But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them...” The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart at least 5 other times (10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). The main purpose was to give God the opportunity to reveal His might numerous times. But it also had a judicial purpose. After you have hardened your heart several times, you may cross God’s deadline. You may reach the point of no return. That is why there are so few deathbed conversions. You would think that when a person is facing death, they would get right with God, almost without exception. But once a person has spent a lifetime rejecting God’s will for their lives, it is often too late to get right with God. God has already hardened their heart as a judgment for the many times they have rejected Him in the past. The problem of a hardened heart, even in the face of judgment, will be repeated in the last days. Read the book of Revelation. Even when God sends His terrible judgments on the world (Rev. 6-16), people will curse God and continue in their sins & not repent (6:15-17; 9:20-21; 16:9, 11).

So Heb. 4:7 says, “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” Don’t wait until the time seems just right to turn to God. The potential consequences are too serious. Have a heart that is tender toward God (cf. 2 Kings 22:19). Yield to His will for your life. Don’t go another day resisting His will.

The third lesson we learn from Pharaoh is this:

### III. DON’T JUST ACT LIKE YOU’RE REPENTING

Do you know of someone who got into big trouble? Perhaps they were arrested and put in jail. Perhaps financial troubles began to overwhelm them. Perhaps their wife left them. And when it seemed they hit bottom, they suddenly got religion. They confess their wrong. They pray. They make promises of how their life is going to be different. Or perhaps you know of someone who found themselves in a battle. They are in a foxhole, and bombs are landing all around. They’ve had no time for God their whole life, but all of a sudden, they confess their sins, and make all kinds of promises of what they will do if God gets them out of the mess they are in. Don’t get me wrong. Some foxhole conversions are real. Some jailhouse conversions are real. But too often, their new-found religion ends as soon as the trouble is over.

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<sup>1</sup> In the earlier plague, perhaps only the animals that were left in the field were killed. That could be the reason they still had some livestock.

Well, that's the way it was with Pharaoh. As you read this story, you have to wonder how Pharaoh could be so slow to surrender to the Lord. But then finally, after the hail storm, he suddenly got religion. He said in chapter 9, v.27, "I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked." He confessed that he had sinned by disobeying the clear command of the Lord. But his confession was nothing more than emotional response to the terror caused by the majesty of God. He also was desperate to do anything to stop the terrifying and destructive storm. So after confessing his sin, he asked Moses to pray that the Lord would stop the hailstorm. He also promised to let the people go.

Moses wasn't fooled by this show on the part of Pharaoh. He knew it wasn't from his heart. He said in v.30, "But as for you and your servants, I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God." All he and his officials wanted to do was stop the terrible hailstorm. Besides, back in chapter 8, Pharaoh had already begged for help when he needed it, and even promised to let the people go (8:8). But then, he changed his mind once the plague was removed (8:15). Sure enough, Pharaoh was up to his old tricks. In his duplicity he reneged on his promise & wouldn't let Israel go. As soon as the plague was out of sight, it was also out of mind.

Later, Pharaoh tried this again. After the terrible plague of locust, which brought him to his knees, we read in 10:16-17, "Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, 'I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only.'" Pharaoh is up to the same old tricks. He asks for just one more chance. Have you heard that before? Once again Pharaoh sought for relief without real repentance. For as soon as the plague ended, and there was relief, Pharaoh once again refused to let the people go (v.20).

Many people will seek the Lord only when there is trouble. But as soon as the trouble passes, they no longer yield to the Lord. If you are the type person who has a long pattern of rebellion against God, forgive us if we are skeptical when you suddenly get religion. Time will tell if your repentance and faith is genuine. Many sinners aren't interested in repenting of sin and receiving God's grace; they want only to be delivered from God's judgment.

In my pastoral ministry, I've met people who were in trouble in one way or another, who begged me to pray that the Lord would deliver them. They made all kinds of promises to me and to the Lord, telling what they'd do if He would help them. But when He did graciously help them, they forgot their promises and even forgot the Lord. So often I never saw them again.

What about you? Is your faith real, or are you just looking for relief from the problems you face? Make sure your conversion is more than just an outward show. Make sure it is from your heart. If you rededicate your life to the Lord, make sure that it's real.

The fourth lesson we learn from Pharaoh is this:

#### IV. DON'T TRY TO COMPROMISE WITH GOD

When God makes a demand upon our lives that seems too great, one of the most common mistakes we make is trying to compromise with God. We think we can bargain with God. We think we can somehow meet Him halfway.

Even so, after the fourth plague, Pharaoh realized that he was no match for the power of God. So he tried compromise. The fact that Pharaoh even thought he could bargain with God is another evidence of his pride. What is mortal man, even the king of a nation, that he dare to negotiate the will of God? He wasn't interested in either the will of God or the welfare of the Jews; all he wanted was to stop the plagues.

In this story we read of 4 attempts at compromise.<sup>2</sup> Look at them with me. The first was:

A. Worship Your God, but Don't Leave the Land – The 4<sup>th</sup> plague was the swarms of flying insects. The word translated “swarms” literally refers to a mixture, so I believe it was more than just house flies. It was probably a mixture of flying insects. The swarm could have even included mosquitoes. Everywhere they went, they were pestered by these flying insects. They were in the air & they were low near the ground. They even infested their homes, and they could find no relief.

This prompted Pharaoh to offer his first compromise. Chapter 8, v.25 says, “Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, ‘Go, sacrifice to your God in the land.’” God had demanded that Pharaoh let His people travel 3 days into the wilderness to worship Him through sacrifices. But Pharaoh tried to get Moses to accept a compromise. They can offer sacrifice, but do it right where they were in the land of Goshen. Pharaoh suspected, undoubtedly, that if Israel would go three days’ journey into the wilderness, they would keep going, and never come back, so he tried this compromise.

Compromise is always unacceptable with God. Moses said in v.27, “We will go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He will command us.” They had to fully obey God’s command. He will not accept anything less. It was all or nothing. Pharaoh’s attempt at compromise was unacceptable for practical reasons as well. Moses said in v.26, “It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, then will they not stone us?” They Egyptians would find their rituals unacceptable. They would especially object if they sacrificed the very animals that they worshipped. The second largest temple that Egypt built was located in Memphis, dedicated to the worship of Apis, the black bull. Moses rightly pointed out that the Egyptians would be so offended that they would stone the Israelites if they offered sacrifices in the land right before their eyes.

Just as Pharaoh tempted and tested Moses with compromise, so the child of God today is tempted with compromise. So there are two applications I want to make here. First, we try to compromise with God by saying that we will go through the rituals of worshipping God, but not separate ourselves from the world. Keep in mind that Egypt is a biblical symbol of the world. And God says in 2 Cor. 6:17, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.” Though we live in the world, there are times when we have to separate ourselves from the world. We have to separate ourselves from the false religious practices of this world, and we have to separate ourselves from the sins of this world. We cannot compromise with God about this. Once we start to negotiate the will of God and see how close we can get to the world, we have already disobeyed Him in our hearts. Yet the contemporary church has made many compromises and for the most part is still in the land of Egypt. You cannot tell the difference today between the average Christian and the average man of the world. Many churches are so much like the world that it is difficult to tell them from the Rotary Club!

The second application is the fact that the practice of the true Christian faith will offend the world. Most secular venues have either excluded faith expressions altogether, or they limit expressions of faith to some generic form of religion. Try praying in Jesus’ name and they may “stone” you with ridicule, so to speak. Yet we cannot compromise on this.

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<sup>2</sup> If time is short, just review the 4 compromises & then make 1 groups of applications after that.

The Chesterfield Board of Supervisors has prayer before their meetings, and they invite local ministers to offer prayer. Yet in their invitation letter, they say that I must offer a non-sectarian prayer, which also means I must not pray in Jesus' name. Other ministers may compromise with the world on that one, but I cannot!

B. Worship Your God, but Don't Go Far Away – Pharaoh offered this compromise in v.28, "I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away." 3 days journey was too far away for him to accept. He realized that if the Israelites offered sacrifice right there in Egypt, it would cause a problem. So he tried to compromise by saying that they could go just a little ways outside of Egypt. He knew that it would be easy to get Israel back if they stayed nearby.

Some people may say, "You can join the church, observe the rituals, but you will not need to make any big changes. Just go a little ways with God. Don't become a fanatic." So many professing Christians give just a little bit of time to God each month. They may serve God just a little. God is not pleased with such compromises.

C. Worship Your God, but Don't Take Your Wives & Children – After several more plagues, and after his advisers put pressure on him, Pharaoh was ready to offer this compromise. We read about this beginning in chapter 10, v.8. Pharaoh wanted to know who was going on this trip to worship the Lord. Moses replied that everyone, including their animals, must be allowed to go (v.9). But Pharaoh insisted that only the men go (v.11). He knew that he could hold their families hostage and guarantee their return to Egypt.<sup>3</sup> However, God rejected this compromise, and a terrible plague of locust followed.

Just as Pharaoh wanted to hold the children in his grasp, even so the devil and the world want your children. We parents often make too many compromises with the world when it comes to our children. We want them to succeed and do well in life. We want them to be socially acceptable. So we allow them to get too involved in the world, and we wonder why they abandon the faith of their childhood & youth.

D. Worship Your God, but Don't Take Your Livestock – This last attempt at compromise was offered after the locust plague, and after the plague of thick darkness. It became so dark in the land of Egypt that they could feel it, and they couldn't see one another. The plague of darkness was a devastating blow. They worshipped the sun god Ra, and even their sun god was powerless before the God of Israel. So Pharaoh offered another compromise. He said in v.24, "Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you." Pharaoh's plan may have been to confiscate all their livestock to replace what he had lost in the plagues. Or it would at least serve as a pledge of their return. Besides, how long would they survive in the wilderness without them?

You might think that just leaving their flocks and herds behind would be a compromise that Moses would accept. Pharaoh has come a long way in making concessions to Moses. But Moses replied in vv.25-26 that they had to have all their animals go with them, because they did not yet know which ones were to be sacrificed to the Lord. In fact, he said, "not a hoof shall be left behind." The very purpose for leaving Egypt, we have been told repeatedly throughout the

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<sup>3</sup> This was unfair, for according to Herodotus (2, 60), the Egyptian women were in the habit of accompanying the men to their religious festivals.

narrative, is so the Israelites can worship the Lord. And their worship would certainly involve animal sacrifice.

Too often we want to compromise with God when it comes to our possessions. We may give our soul to God, but not our possessions. A tithe seems too great a sacrifice, so we compromise by giving God half that much, or even less. Actually, all that you have belongs to God. You are just a steward of it. Even what you keep for your own use, you are to use it for His glory. The Bible says that He “gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17). Be sure you thank God for the good things that you enjoy from His good hand.

The main point I want to make is that you can’t compromise with God. Moses was right in not accepting any compromise at all. God cannot lower His standards to accommodate your sinful desires. Instead, we should go all the way with God. Sometimes other people, especially unbelievers, will urge you to compromise your convictions, and give only partial obedience. But commitment and obedience to God cannot be negotiated.

There are times when compromise is acceptable. You can compromise with other people in order to resolve conflict and get along. But when it comes to God, compromise is unacceptable.

Conclusion: Pharaoh received a difficult command from God, and he responded in the wrong way. You and I have received some difficult commands from God. It starts with the command to repent of our sin. God told Pharaoh, “Let my people go,” and He says to us, “Let go of that sin.” Will you today? Then, we must believe in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, and what He did at the cross. Stop trusting in your own goodness to earn your way to heaven. Trust in Christ alone. Then, Jesus said in Mt. 16:24, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” I know that’s a difficult command, but we must obey the voice of God. Anything less than total personal commitment is simply not good enough. If you fail to obey God’s command to repent & believe in His Son, you run the grave risk of facing some of the judgments pictured in the plagues, including the plague of utter darkness. Remember, hell is a place of “outer darkness” (Mt. 8:12).

So the next time God speaks to you through His Word, or a sermon, or through a lesson, and gives you a difficult command, remember to avoid the same mistakes that Pharaoh made. Humble yourself and acknowledge that God has the right to make any demand upon your life. He alone is God. Instead of hardening your heart, fear God and yield your life to Him. Obey Him. It’s only when we obey God that we can truly enjoy His blessings. And don’t just act like you are giving your life to the Lord. Make sure a conversion or rededication is real, and lasting. And finally, don’t try to compromise with God. Just do what He says with your whole heart.

Sources: Ronald A. Beers, ed., *Life Application Study Bible* (Tyndale House & Zondervan, 1991); Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Stephen Felker, [\*Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible\*](#) (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2007; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Manfred G. Gutzke, *Plain Talk on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 82-85; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Clarence Larkin, *Rightly Dividing the Word* (Philadelphia: Erwin W. Moyer Company, 1920); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 64-68; Warren Wiersbe, *Be Delivered: Exodus* (Colorado Spring: Chariot Victor Books Publishing, 1998). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).