

Exodus Chapter 7

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] We're going to read now from our Bibles, and if you'd like to find Exodus and chapter 7. Exodus and chapter 7, that's where we're going to read from.

Now those of you who are regularly with us, we've been going through Exodus, and seeing how God has met with Moses and called him and sent him to Egypt, and how Moses' first attempt, in that sense, to free the people of God, failed dismally, because Pharaoh then just made things more difficult for God's people, for the Hebrews, and told them they had to make bricks without straw, and make their life much more difficult.

And poor Moses was rather discouraged. So we're going to pick up from Exodus and chapter 6, verse 28. So the last three verses of chapter 6, and then we're going to read the whole of chapter 7. So, as once more, Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh and how God works through them.

So verse 28 of chapter 6 of Exodus, and into chapter 7. Now when the Lord spoke to Moses in Egypt, he said to him, I am the Lord. Tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, everything I tell you.

[1 : 20] But Moses said to the Lord, Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me? Then the Lord said to Moses, See, I've made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet.

You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart.

Though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt, and with mighty acts of judgment, I will bring out my divisions, my people, the Israelites.

And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it. Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded.

Moses were 80 years old, and Aaron 83 years, when they spoke to Pharaoh. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, When Pharaoh says to you, Perform a miracle, then say to Aaron, Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.

[2 : 30] So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned the wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts.

Each one threw down his staff, and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up all their staffs, yet Pharaoh's heart became hard, and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said. Then the Lord said to Moses, Pharaoh's heart is unyielding. He refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the water. Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake.

Then say to him, The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you, Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert. But until now you have not listened.

This is what the Lord says. By this you will know that I am the Lord. With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink.

[3 : 41] The Egyptians will not be able to drink its water. The Lord said to Moses, Tell Aaron, Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs, and they will turn to blood.

Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars. Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood.

The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt. But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard.

He would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said. Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart. And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.

Well, if the children would like to go out to a crash and Sunday school now, please. That's great.

Thank you. So we're in Exodus and Chapter 7, and if you'd like to turn there, that would be helpful.

[5 : 06] I'm sure most of us at some time have had to visit a very large hospital, perhaps like the James Cook in Middlesbrough. Thankfully for most of us, it's just been a visit.

We've just been to see somebody there, perhaps a friend, a relative, who's receiving treatment. And these city hospitals, like James Cook and others, are vast places.

Because really, they're hospitals within hospitals. Each section has its own special area of expertise. Each ward is set apart for the treatment of a particular area of the body, or a type of illness, or injury, or disease.

And so as you walk along the very long corridors that link the wards, you see signs indicating what's within that ward. The oncology department, haematology, pediatric unit, cardiology, coronary care unit, the list goes on.

If you can explain to me what any of those words mean, I'd be very grateful. But each of them specialize in different aspects of health care. And yet they're all linked. They're all interrelated.

[6 : 09] Not just by the corridors, but because, of course, the human body, every part of it is interrelated and linked. Just like those corridors in the hospital.

But probably the most important and vital part of the body is the heart. The condition of the heart has a major influence upon the health of the rest of the body.

We recognize, of course, that the heart is not only important to our physical health, and having a healthy heart keeps our bodies healthy. But also we recognize that we think of the heart as the very center of ourself.

And so we use phrases like being heartbroken over expressing grief or sorrow. We speak about somebody not having their heart in it, expressing a sense of indifference or inactivity.

The heart is much more than just the organ that pumps the bloods. And as we read through Exodus, and as we've already read through Exodus 7 particularly, we've noticed that the heart of Pharaoh is spoken of again and again.

[7 : 15] And in each occasion, his heart is described as being hardened. A hard heart. What is a hard heart? Again, it's a phrase that we use, don't we, when we speak of somebody.

Or he's hard hearted. May mean that there's somebody who's insensitive or selfish to the needs of others. Hard hearted is somebody who has no sympathy or generosity over the concerns of others. And certainly that's true with Pharaoh. As we've seen and looked at what he's done, the way he's treated the Hebrews and the slaves. He's clearly a cruel man. He's a thoughtless man concerning the suffering of the slaves.

When Moses went first of all and brought God's message, instead of letting the people go or being sympathetic to their cause, what does he do? He makes life harder for them and increases the misery of their slavery.

Make them work harder, he says in chapter 5, so that they will keep working and pay no attention to lies. He has no heart for the people. Yet above all else, when we read through chapter 7 particularly, we see that the hardness of heart in Pharaoh is much more than his attitude to other people.

[8 : 27] It's his attitude to God, his attitude to the Lord. The heart is that place from which all of our attitudes and our actions spring.

When Jesus was teaching in Matthew in chapter 15, he spoke about the heart and spoke about the reality of this truth. For out of the heart, he said, come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

From the heart these things come. It's with our hearts that we love or we hate. It's with our hearts that we accept or reject people. And it's with our hearts that we relate to or reject God.

Our heart is that place where faith lives if we are believers. In Romans chapter 10 and verse 10, Paul writes, For it is with your heart that you believe.

So faith from the heart. It's into our hearts that God has poured his Holy Spirit so that we know that we are loved by God if we are Christians. In Romans chapter 5 and verse 5, God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he's given us.

[9 : 49] And it's with our hearts that we are meant to worship God, not just with our mouths or our lips. God's complaint against his own people in Isaiah 29 was this, These people honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.

So the heart is intrinsically important to living the Christian life and to relating to God. In fact it makes all the difference in the world between being a Christian and not being a Christian. Between knowing about God and being a child of God. Between having eternal life or eternal sorrow. Again, earlier on, Romans chapter 10, Paul says, With our heart we believe and are saved. So it's vital that we know the state of our hearts. Great drive, of course, on TV about our physical hearts and having them checked up and making sure that they're healthy and cutting out those things that are dangerous to our hearts.

And perhaps some of you have had things like an ECG on your heart. A test where you undergo exercises and your heart is monitored and linked to something that records how the heart responds to exercise.

[11 : 01] How it reacts to those tests. So similarly in the events of Exodus chapter 7, we have this heart check-up we might say for Pharaoh.

His heart is being tested and monitored by God. And we want to look at his heart and see whether our heart is anything like that.

His heart is an unhealthy, hard heart. And we'll see that. But his heart stands in contrast to that of Moses and Aaron in this passage. Though it's only Pharaoh's heart that's spoken about and described, there's a clear contrast in between the way that he acts and behaves and between Moses and Aaron.

Their heart appears to be healthy and well. And so here we have the best Bible, sorry, there we have the best heart monitor available, the Bible. We could all do with a check-up.

We could all do with knowing the state of our hearts this morning. It's important that we do. And how these men's hearts react to these tests. And the readout that we have will helpfully show us whether our hearts are healthy or poorly.

[12 : 16] So how does a hard heart differ from a healthy heart? What is it that sets them apart? What is the different reading, as it were, on the monitor that the Bible is? Well, first of all, a hard heart is seen in the response that it has to God's Word.

The response it has to God's Word. Now Moses and Aaron have a healthy heart. We see that because when God speaks to them and gives them clear instruction, you are to say everything I commanded you, again and again they are obedient.

They respond to God's Word and commands with yes and do it. Now we see at the end of chapter 6, Moses didn't find that easy. In fact, Moses was quite worried about it.

He said, since I speak with faltering lips, that's a concern he'd raised even when he was back in the desert in Midian, that he had a stuttering lips. We don't know whether he had a lisp or a stutter or a speech impediment of some sort.

He said, well, why should Pharaoh listen to me? And of course God gives him Aaron to speak for him, to be his mouthpiece. So even though he found it hard and difficult, on more than one occasion we read that Moses and Aaron were careful to do all that God commanded them.

[13 : 31] Verse 6, Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded. Verse 10, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. There's a response to God's Word, which is obedience.

To believe God's Word and to do it. But what about Pharaoh? Well, we know his heart is hard and we can see that by the way he reacts to God's Word spoken to him by Moses and Aaron.

He does not listen. That's the recurring theme of the test, the recurring results of the monitor on his heart. Verse 13, Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them.

Then also in verse 22 as well. Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron just as the Lord had said.

Now God had warned Moses that this would happen. He'd warned him that if he speaks to Pharaoh, Pharaoh's heart will be hard. But you see, to listen is not, sorry, not to listen is not the same as not to hear.

[14 : 37] Not to listen is not the same as not to hear. So it wasn't that Pharaoh didn't listen because he wasn't in the room and he couldn't hear them. There's a difference, isn't it, between hearing and listening. Pharaoh heard God's Word.

He understood what God was saying to him, that he should let the people go. He knew what God was commanding, but he wouldn't listen to God's Word.

He wouldn't accept it. He wouldn't receive it as being truly what God commanded him to do. He did not accept it as truth. And so here there's first heart checkup.

How does my heart respond to God's Word? When I read his Word, when I hear his Word, when his Word is preached. Is my heart like Moses and Aaron's?

Is my heart a heart that says, though it may be difficult for me at times, and though I struggle with it at times, and though I find it a problem, because perhaps the way people will respond to me, or the way that they react towards me, or because it's costly for me, yet I will do all that I can to obey God's command.

[15 : 47] I'll do all that I can, Lord, to do your will. There's a heart that's submissive to your Word. Or are we like Pharaoh this morning? I won't listen to God's Word when he speaks to me.

I know and understand what the words that are said. I understand what it means. I understand that God is speaking. But I won't accept it. I won't accept it as God, and I won't accept it into my heart and act upon it.

I'll harden my heart against it. I wonder which one of those hearts is like yours or mine. The second way in which we can see the results of the tests that God brings to Moses and Aaron, and ultimately to Pharaoh, is this, is in their reaction to God's works.

So first of all, their response to God's Word, and now their reaction to God's work. And to occasion, God works and acts in a miraculous way, doesn't he? A supernatural way to show them that he is real and that he is powerful.

First of all, there's the changing of the staff of Aaron into a snake. And then there's the changing of the river water of the Nile into blood. Now, again, we're not told specifically how Moses and Aaron responded to those works of God.

[17 : 05] But it's obvious that their hearts were healthy by the fact that they trusted God to do what he commanded. And through them, God performed those miracles. Through Aaron throwing down his staff and it becoming a snake, and Aaron stretching his arm over the water with the staff, the two miracles were performed.

God worked through them because they were willing for God's work to have its place in their lives. But what about Pharaoh? Well, Pharaoh's reaction is much more obvious, isn't it?

And shows again that his heart is hard. He does two things which show that his heart is hard, and that he reacts wrongly to God's work. The first is this.

He asks his magicians to perform counterfeit alternative miracles. See, verse 11, Pharaoh then summoned the wise men and sorcerers. The Egyptian magicians also did the same by their secret arts.

Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. Then later on, verse 22, the Egyptian magicians did the same things by the secret arts. In other words, turning water into blood.

[18 : 15] Now, what does this say? What does this show? Well, it shows, first of all, that Pharaoh recognizes that these are supernatural things, that these are powerful things, they're real.

And he seeks to mimic them so that he doesn't have to accept that God did them. He seeks to counterfeit them so that he can reject the God who performed them.

Now, it shouldn't surprise us in the world in which we live that many people run after that which is counterfeit and false. And there are all sorts of false gospels, all sorts of counterfeit promises and counterfeit answers to the consequences of our sin.

People will run after those things to satisfy the desire of their hearts. Within them, as Billy Graham said, is a God-shaped hole. But people try to stuff it with everything else.

With money, with career, with relationships. They think that all those things will somehow deaden their conscience, will somehow prevent them from thinking about their guilt, prevent them from having to think about God.

[19 : 24] But they're all counterfeit and they're all empty. And in many of the religions of the world around about us, there are also those who perform counterfeit miracles, offer a counterfeit spirituality.

When Paul was writing his letter to the Thessalonians, he warned them that Satan, the devil, acts and works through counterfeit, through mimicking the things of God. 2 Thessalonians 2 in verse 9. In accordance with the work of Satan, displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.

And so you have all sorts of strange things being spoken of, religions and cults offering all sorts of alternatives. But they are not true, and they are not real, and they are not of God.

So Pharaoh, he requests that the magicians produce an alternative. But you see, even if you were Pharaoh and you saw the mimic, and you saw the alternatives, you could say, well, God's works are greater.

[20 : 38] Do you notice how it is that Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs? I remember watching Cecil B. DeMille's Ten Commandments. Have you ever seen that one? And it's a sort of animated thing where the snakes swallow up the other snakes.

But again, it shows that Aaron's staff, Aaron's miracle, was more powerful than those of the magicians. And again, if these magicians were so clever that they could turn water into blood, why couldn't they turn blood into water?

That would be much better, much more useful. No, it's obvious that God's works are greater. And the second thing is this, that in spite of seeing the works of God, Pharaoh's heart is hard because he is unwilling to take these works to heart.

That's the phrase that's used in verse 23. Instead, he turned and went into his palace and did not take even this to heart. To take something to heart is to receive it, isn't it?

To take something to heart is to accept it as personally for ourselves. He wouldn't acknowledge the truth behind these works. He wouldn't acknowledge the reality of the God who did them and the authority of the God who did them.

[21 : 49] He saw what God could do. He knew it was remarkable. But he would not turn from resisting God. There's some people who say even today, if only I could see a miracle like Moses performed or a miracle that Jesus did, then of course I'd believe and become a Christian and put my faith in Jesus.

But the sad truth is that the large majority of people who saw the miracles of Jesus didn't believe in him. So they wouldn't do it today either. In fact, those who saw his miracles didn't follow him and believe in him.

But those who saw his miracles at the end were the ones who called for his death. No miracle will change a hard heart. No miracle, no sign will cause somebody to be convinced of God's work, of God's truth, of God's authority.

However, that doesn't mean that God's works can't be seen. It doesn't mean that God's works aren't there for everyone to see and to believe. The Bible makes it very clear that there are signs around about us.

If only we would see them, wonderful, marvelous signs that God has done. If only we will recognize them as being God's, which show to us and prove to us that God is real and that we must submit to him and put our faith in him.

[23 : 06] The first and greatest, in one sense of these, is creation itself. This world in which we live. The natural world. In Romans and chapter 1, Paul writes and speaks about the fact that people have no excuse not to believe in God.

He says, For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power, and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

That's why atheism so powerfully pushes against creation. And why, sadly, the empty theory of evolution, creation, which robs God of his place as creator, tries to turn people's eyes from what is plainly seen, that this is a world with the hallmarks of God's design upon it.

It's a wonderfully designed and created world. If the world would see that, then they would believe in God. But again, sadly, behind these things, false things and teachings abroad.

The second thing is that in our own lives as Christians, God's work is seen. You and I, dear friends, are testimony to the work and grace of God.

[24 : 18] We are testimony to the power of God. That's why I truly believe that a Christian living out his or her life faithfully, living for God, is a most powerful tool for evangelism.

That if we will live as God wants us to live, day by day, and be the people he wants us to be, then people cannot deny the new creation, the transformation, the change that he's brought in our lives. Jesus again says this in Matthew 5, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. In other words, by the way you live, you're a light. Jesus said, I am the light of the world, but then he calls us the light of the world as well. In your life and mine, in our testimony, of how we've come to faith in Christ and how he's kept us and sustained us, how he's proven himself faithful to us, these things are powerful signs and visible pictures for the world.

One of the reasons that you and I are not in glory now is because God has kept us here in this world to be lights in a dark place. The very purpose of your life and mine, dear friends, is that purpose.

[25 : 30] It isn't that we should make a living and earn money or have a family, but that we might be a light for the gospel of Christ. There's purpose and meaning that God has placed upon each one of us.

But also there is the visible works of God in the life of every single human being. Every person's individual life, the joys and the sorrows of life, the highs and the lows of life, all meant to remind us that life comes from and depends upon God.

especially the brevity of life. That should shout out to the people of this world that really there is more to this world than what we see, touch and feel.

Psalms 103, As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field. The wind blows over and it is gone and its place remembers it no more.

But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him and his righteousness with their children's children. You see, surely, the very fact and reality of death must make us see that there is a God in this world and that there is more to life than just what we have now.

[26 : 43] But again, sadly, many people harden their hearts. So the lie is taught in all sorts of ways. The lie is, the counterfeit is taught, well, there's nothing at the end of life in this world that's death and there's nothing, it's emptiness.

You cease to exist. That's not true. But the worst and most pernicious lie is the lie that Christian church has taught in the whole, which is this.

That if you're a good person, you'll go to heaven. That God will accept everybody. That everybody's going to be there one day. And you hear it, sadly, at funerals where people who've lived with no thought or concern for Christ or for the gospel are assured that simply because God is love, there is no judgment, there is no hell.

That isn't true. But all these things, shout out, shout out and prove to people that God is at work in this world and that he is there for us to acknowledge and to believe.

Do you recognize God's work around about you? Do you see the handiwork of God in your own life, in the ups and the downs and the trials and the sorrows? Do you see that all these things are pointing to your need to trust him, to follow him, to believe upon him?

[28 : 02] Do you thank God for what he is doing? Give him praise. Do you take to heart what you see so that your heart is open to be used by God, for him to work through?

Or are you like Pharaoh who thinks that the false and the counterfeit is just as good, that the empty things of this world that can be produced can fill the void that is God's?

And all that God has done for you in your life in sparing you to this point in time and giving you life and watching over you. Have you acknowledged that or are you unmoved towards it? Are you determined not to let God work in your heart and life?

Are you continually hardening your heart Sunday by Sunday saying, God, I will not have you be king of my life? I remember seeing a TV documentary several years ago.

It was about a man who had undergone surgery to remove both of his legs and the reason he'd had to have his legs removed was because his arteries had been so clogged because he'd smoked all his life heavily.

[29 : 13] And he'd gone and had further tests and the tests had shown that those arteries around his heart, closest to his heart, were nearly, nearly, completely blocked.

It would only be just a matter of time really before he would have to have a heart attack and die. When those results were relayed to the man and he was told that unless he stopped smoking he was almost certainly going to die very quickly unless he started to reverse the damage he'd done,

instead of listening to those doctors he completely ignored them.

He wouldn't give up that which he knew was killing him and so in at least two ways he was hardening his own heart. What about us dear friends?

Do you want a healthy heart? Do you want a heart that is as it should be? A heart which listens to God's word? A heart that sees God's work?

A heart that lives and beats as it should? Well we can't make it ourselves. We can't change our hearts but God has promised to do it for us.

[30 : 22] He says here in Ezekiel he says I will give you a new heart, put a new spirit within you. I'll remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh and I'll put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Ask the Lord for a new heart. Ask him for healthy hearts. Well let's sing together as we close our time this morning.

It's a hymn which is really again a prayer 739 739 Oh for a heart to praise my God a heart from sin set free a heart that always feels your blood so freely shed for me.

So it goes on. Is this our prayer? Is this our longing? That we might no longer be hard-hearted but our hearts may continually be softened and made strong.

739■ A heart of sin set free A heart that always heals thy blood So freely shed for me Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart Come quickly from above

[32 : 26] And I you lay upon my heart Thy illness, name of God May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace As you trust in him So that you may overflow with hope By the power of the Holy Spirit Amen Amen