



Freedom Means... Making Choices

Exodus 4:29-5:2, 7:1-4a, 8:29-32 (AFBC 7/15/18)

During this month of July, we're focusing on freedom by looking at the great freedom struggle that we find in the Old Testament book of Exodus. While doing so, we're also keeping front and center Jesus' teaching that "It's the truth that sets us free."

God's truth is found in His written word, the Bible; but the highest expression of God's truth for you and me is embodied in the Living Word, Jesus Christ, to whom the Written Word bears witness.

God designed us to live as free people. It's His truth that sets us free... but only as we embrace this freedom that's found in the Person of His Son and in the pages of His Book.

Which means that **God takes our freedom so seriously, He actually gives us the freedom to resist His truth—or to reject it altogether.** At least, that's what I believe—and I think most of you do as well.

But now let's turn to our texts for today, passages that some claim call into question everything that I just said. Please follow along closely as I read:

Exodus 4:29-5:2 Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, ³⁰ and Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, ³¹ and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped. 5 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'" ² Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey

him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go.”

Exodus 7:1-4a Then the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. ² 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. ³ But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in Egypt, ⁴ he will not listen to you.

Exodus 8:29-32 Moses answered, “As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the LORD, and tomorrow the flies will leave Pharaoh and his officials and his people. Only let Pharaoh be sure that he does not act deceitfully again by not letting the people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD.” ³⁰ Then Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD, ³¹ and the LORD did what Moses asked. The flies left Pharaoh and his officials and his people; not a fly remained. ³² But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.

This was a dramatic confrontation. If you believe you’re god--and Pharaoh did—this makes you an enemy of the real God. The Lord God makes it clear that we’re to have no other gods besides Him.

So... we can see why Pharaoh’s claim of being Divine set up a confrontation between himself and Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob... and also, the God of Moses, that pesky, tongue-tied prophet who dared to come before Pharaoh on behalf of this God of the Hebrew slaves to courageously demand, “Let my people go.”

Egyptian Pharaohs weren’t used to people making demands and giving them ultimatums--no one dared! But that’s exactly what God did through Moses, and it set up a classic confrontation between a man who thought he was god and the One True God.

This kind of thing still goes on—usually in less dramatic ways—but it still happens. **Not many folks who have their wits about them claim to be God, but some do assign supreme importance to themselves and believe there is no higher authority for their lives than their own.**

That’s playing God, too; and it ultimately results in a confrontation with the Almighty. It’s called judgment; and I promise you, we always want to be on God’s side when that takes place!

Pharaoh learned this the hard way. With all his wealth and power and loyal subjects, he could not for the life of him stop what God was determined to do.

We can learn from Pharaoh. He resisted God back then in ways quite similar to how people resist God today. We would do well to learn from Pharaoh, so that we don't repeat his mistakes.

I. What was there about Pharaoh that caused him to oppose God so tenaciously? I think we can find at least four fatal flaws: the first being His **IGNORANCE**. Look, please, at **Exodus 5:2**. Pharaoh says, "**Who is the Lord? ...I do not know him.**"

Isn't this how people in our day dismiss God from their minds? I cannot see God. I cannot touch God. I cannot scientifically study God nor prove His existence. Therefore, I cannot know God, nor feel any sense of responsibility toward Him.

This is the way the secular mind thinks; and haven't we all been secularized some. How could we live in *this* world and not be?!?

Langdon Gilkey, in his book *Naming the Whirlwind*, identified four characteristics of secularity. He says that we as Christians had better know and understand these traits if we want to convey faith to people today. The four traits he identifies are: contingency, autonomy, temporality and relativity.

A. Contingency means that **everything that is was caused by some natural phenomenon which preceded it**. The world and everything in it becomes a chance happening, a cosmic accident, with no answers for the "whys" of our existence--for there are no answers. Our existence is reason-less, according to this view.

B. That leads to **Autonomy**, the second trait of secularism. With God out of the picture, **we define our own destiny**. If life is to have any meaning, we must create it for ourselves. No one's in charge of us, but us.

C. The result of this is **Relativity**. **Absolute right and wrong no longer exist**. Individuals and societies must decide what is and what is not acceptable relative to their particular situations in life.

D. Then, finally, secularity is characterized by **Temporality**, the view that **reality is limited to what exists right now**. This life is all there is. You only get one crack at it, so make the most of it and let the other guy fend for himself.

“Who is the Lord? ...I do not know him,” Pharaoh said. It wasn’t that there wasn’t any information around. He could have learned something from Moses, but he wasn’t willing to know. He was unwilling to listen because that might require some change.

Knowing about God is like that. The more we learn, the more we must change about ourselves. So, like Pharaoh, many choose the bliss of ignorance. They simply close their minds to God’s truth.

II. Another way we resist God is through **PRIDE**. Pride has been called the source of all sin. Now, this is not, of course, the kind of pride that enables us to feel positive about ourselves and motivates us to do our best. That’s healthy and good.

But there’s another kind of pride—**sinful pride—which thinks too highly of self, always at the expense of others. This is the prejudicial, look-down-your-nose, others-don’t-really-count kind of pride**. It’s ugly. It fills us with so much self-concern that there’s no room in our lives for God or for other people.

The Pharaoh had a “double dose” of pride. After all, he’d been raised from childhood to think of himself as a god. Now, he had all the wealth and power of Egypt at his command.

Power has a way of messing up our minds. Too much power in any sphere of life can corrupt, and examples of this are plentiful.

So here we have this prideful Pharaoh being confronted by the Prophet Moses, who had spent the last 40 years of his life tending sheep. I hear that’s a humbling occupation, friends. Anyone who answers the call to shepherd the sheep must trudge through a lot of what the sheep leave behind. I’ll refrain from giving examples.

Anyway, the point is, **this encounter between Pharaoh and Moses was a confrontation of lifestyles and attitudes. It was a battle between meekness and pride.**

Moses came to Pharaoh as the prophet of the Hebrew's God and Pharaoh just chuckled to himself, "Ha! The god of slaves. Why should I care about what he says?"

Pharaoh wasn't about to give in to this sheep herder and his god, plagues notwithstanding. He was strong, and Israel was weak. He had a reputation to maintain. So when Moses asked if the Hebrews could journey into the wilderness to hold a feast to the Lord, Pharaoh scoffed and gave the Hebrews more work to do.

In his pride, Pharaoh responded with power: "I'll show them who's boss!" In so doing, he brought upon himself the overwhelming power of God. Many people feel that to acknowledge their need of God is to appear weak, and they refuse to do it.

The only thing strong about a person like this, however, is their pride. If allowed to continue, that kind of pride will lead to their destruction. Pharaoh's pride, and ours, stand in opposition to God's purposes. But this kind of pride won't stand for long.

III. Then, to ignorance and pride, we add **GREED**. Pharaoh was greedy. He considered the people of Israel to be his property. They were tools to be used, and then cast aside.

The thoughts of setting them free didn't set well with Pharaoh. That would mean giving up the benefits of their labor. The sin of greed had Pharaoh in its grasp.

Greed causes people to treat others as objects to be used to achieve their own ends. That may work for a while, but people can only stand it for so long. Given time, people who are being treated as objects, **people who are being used and abused to satisfy the greed of others, rebel.**

Their rebellion is then usually met with demonstrations of power, and the initial rebellions are often crushed; but history teaches us that they have a way of recurring until finally it is the oppressor who falls. Eventually, a large price is paid for greed.

Pharaoh learned. Others have learned this too. Nations and governments have learned this; and no doubt others will do so in

the future. The great problem with greed is, by its very nature, it forces us to learn some lessons the hard way.

Pharaoh learned that the Hebrew people were not his property; they belonged to God. He paid a terrible price to learn that lesson. Greed always stands in opposition to God, but not forever.

IV. Finally, Pharaoh points us to one other way to resist God and, thus, another character flaw to avoid: **STUBBORNNESS**—what we often refer to as hard-headedness. The Bible, though, calls it **hard-heartedness**.

Now, before we talk about this, I want you to look back at a couple of verses from our Scripture reading. God is speaking to Moses in **Exodus 7:3**, saying, **“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you.”**

But now look at what we’re told in **Exodus 8:32**: **“But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.”**

There’s a crucial difference in these two verses. In the first one, God tells Moses that He will harden Pharaoh’s heart. The second verse, however, says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

Here’s a very interesting thing. **If you read** this entire section from **Exodus 4 through Exodus 9, you will find nine places where God is said to have hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and nine others where it says Pharaoh hardened his own heart,** or it simply says that he had a hard heart.



What are we to make of this? The sovereignty of God and our freedom to choose seem to collide here, and the Bible teaches

both. **God is all-powerful. He is in control of his creation. Yet people have the ability and responsibility to choose between God's way and their own way.**

So, again, what are we to make of this? Well, when you and I are confronted with a decision, and then we make that decision—right or wrong—what do we do next? We begin convincing ourselves that we made the right decision. We try to convince others, too.

But sometimes we make bad decisions. If there's someone around who really cares about us, they'll try to help us see our mistake. Our reaction, though, may be to travel even further down the wrong road, stubbornly insisting that it's the right one for us.

God wanted Pharaoh to let His people go, but God knew Pharaoh. He knew that Pharaoh was not about to do this without a lot of "encouragement."

So God pushed hard for the release of His people. He sent His servant Moses, and then He sent one plague after another. Every time God pushed, though, Pharaoh resisted; and his heart became harder and harder and harder. By pushing for what was right, God caused Pharaoh's heart to harden, and Pharaoh held on even more tenaciously, more stubbornly, to the wrong.

But I believe that was Pharaoh's choice. Out of ignorance, pride, greed, and stubbornness, he chose to resist God's will.

Moses, you recall, also had a choice. He **almost resisted God's will for his life; but instead, he became responsive to God. He chose to follow God's will. But Moses had a choice.**

And so do we. Here it is: God comes to us and calls us to respond to Him in faith. This invitation draws some closer to God; but the same invitation drives others away.

It's like this: have you noticed that the warmth of the sun will cause wax to melt, but causes clay to harden? Likewise, the warmth of God's love will cause responsive hearts to melt before Him, while other hearts only harden and shut God out.

I believe God wants every heart to yield to Him. He goes to extreme measures to help us respond to Him. He reached down in

compassion to deliver Israel, not just in Exodus, but over and over again.

Then, when the time was right, God made his final plea in the person of His only Son, Jesus Christ. The Father sent His only begotten as a sacrifice for our sin.

Hear the message of the Gospel. Picture Christ hanging on a very cruel cross... and know that he died there for you and for me.

Listen: if this won't melt our hearts before God, and cause us to embrace God's forgiveness and love, nothing will!

So, what choice have you made? What choice are you making now? Today, if you hear God's voice, do not harden your heart!