

Exodus 7:8-11:10

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[0 : 00] this is Matthias Schlitter. I've been practicing that all week. It could have been embarrassing. Matthias Schlitter. And he is the 14 times world arm wrestling champion.

And he has a distinct disadvantage because he has a genetic malformation that means his right hand is 40% bigger than his left hand.

They call him Popeye because I guess that's what Popeye looks like if he only ate half a portion of spinach. And you have to say, if you were Matthias' opponent, you'd think this is a little bit unfair. He's almost like an X-Man with his huge right hand. What we're going to see today in Exodus chapters 6 to 10 is a cosmic mismatch.

We're going to see God and Egypt engaged in a battle for hearts and minds. We're going to see incredible things.

[1 : 09] It's like the rumble in the jungle, the thriller in Manila, Rocky 1 to 6, all rolled into one. What we have before us is an unbelievable drama. As Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, does battle with Pharaoh, one of the gods considered by the Egyptians.

It is a cosmic mismatch. He would take the odds on beating the German arm wrestler any day of the week. So if you've got a Bible, please turn to Exodus chapter 7 and we'll read verses 2 to 5.

You should have also got a handout as you came in, which will be so useful to you. Exodus chapter 7 verse 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.

But I will harden Pharaoh's heart and though I multiply my 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 up 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.

[2 : 31] Here's the big theme of this morning. God will be God and everyone will know it. God will be God and everyone will know it.

And so in chapter 7, just a little bit further down in verse 8, we come to like the weigh-in that you have before all good. Boxing matches. It's the sparring and the trash talk.

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 before Pharaoh and it will become a snake. 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 acts.

Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. It's a bit of a sign of things to come.

[3 : 41] That Aaron's done a miraculous sign and the wise men and sorcerers have copied it and Aaron's snake has swallowed all the other snakes.

It's a bit of a sign of things to come. We can't actually read the whole account this morning. So please just turn to Exodus chapter 9 and we'll read about the plague of hail just to give us a bit of a flavor of how this is happening.

Then the Lord said to Moses get up early in the morning confront Pharaoh and say to him this is what the Lord the God of the Hebrews says let my people go so that they may worship me or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.

For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth but I have raised you up for this very purpose that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

You still set yourself against my people and will not let them go. Therefore at this time tomorrow I will send the worst hail storm that has ever fallen on Egypt from the day it was founded till now.

[5 : 02] Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter because the hail will fall on every person and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field and they will die.

Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord hurried to bring the slaves and their livestock inside but those who ignored the word of the Lord left their slaves and livestock in the field. Then the Lord said to Moses stretch out your hand towards the sky so that hail will fall all over Egypt on people and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt. When Moses stretched out his staff towards the sky the Lord sent thunder and hail and lightning flashed down to the ground.

So the Lord rained hail down on the land of Egypt. Hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation.

Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields both people and animals it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen where the Israelites were.

[6 : 12] Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron this time I have sinned he said to them the Lord is in the right and I and my people are in the wrong. Pray to the Lord for we have had enough thunder and hail I will let you go you don't have to stay any longer.

Moses replied when I have gone out of the city I will spread out my hands in prayer to the Lord the thunder will stop and there will be no more hail so you may know that the earth is the Lord's. But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord.

The flax and the barley were destroyed since the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bloom. The wheat and the spelt however were not destroyed because they ripened later. When Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city he spread out his hands towards the Lord.

The thunder and hail stopped and the rain no longer poured down on the land. When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped he sinned again. He and his officials hardened their hearts so Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go just as the Lord had said through Moses.

I guess it is such a famous story isn't it? These nine plagues. We start quite small scale with the staff that turns into a snake.

[7 : 25] We then move to blood and the river Nile becoming blood and if you read it it becomes really unpleasant because they don't have any water to drink but also all the fish die.

I don't know if you ever walked past a fishmonger on a Friday night but the smell of all the fish that they've thrown away that they haven't been able to sell horrendous. Just imagine that's running down the middle of your city with dead Nemo all over the place.

Then we get frogs and this too is utterly disgusting. It says in the narrative that frogs will be absolutely everywhere. They'll be in your house they'll be in your bedroom they'll be on your bed they'll be on your kneading troughs where you make the bread and they'll be in your ovens while you cook the bread.

I've got a really nice baker on Easter Road called the Manor House. Frog flavour is not on the menu. Not a great thing. France perhaps. Easter Road definitely not.

And it gets to the point where they pile all the frogs up into massive piles and if rotting fish is disgusting rotting frogs I dread to think. And for these first two plagues the wise men and sorcerers in Egypt copy Moses.

[8 : 45] Now they call themselves wise men but it doesn't seem very wise. The problem we have is too much blood in the rivers and lots of dead fish. Pharaoh we've given you some more blood so there'll be more dead fish.

Problem is we've got frogs everywhere do you know what we've made some new ones. Really wise men. Just really unpleasant. And then we get the gnats or you could translate it horsefly but I like to think of it like midges because it reminds me of the Isle of Skye where I once had the most excruciating camping holiday you could ever imagine.

Two of the three nights I slept in the car because I could bear it no longer just everywhere swarms of the things and then flies. You know how when a midge bites you there's a bit of blood? That's how you know you've been bitten by a midge? And then just imagine that the flies come and they're all like on all your bites and that horrible thing that goes just like getting in there just disgusting.

Really unpleasant. And then round five the cows get it and the livestock which in an agrarian society like Egypt this is a real problem.

[9 : 59] If all your cows and sheep die. And then it starts to hit people festering boils. I'm not a big fan of the boil at the best of times but a festering boil that's like the worst kind.

And then the hail that we read about like killer hail. We're not talking about when I did the Holyroad run round Edinburgh at the beginning of January and there was like little hail that was like being shot with a BB gun.

This was like being hit with a rock just coming down and coming down and wiping out everything. And then there were the locusts just taking out everything that hadn't already been destroyed by the hail.

And then darkness. Absolute terror for three days. And what does the narrative say? Darkness that could be felt. Like that eerie, horrible, thick, tangible darkness.

darkness. And then round 10 comes which Kenny is going to tell us about next week. And I guess what are we to make about this? Is this just ammunition for the militant atheist to say yes truly God is vindictive?

[11 : 18] And he does go on these tirades and afflict terrible pain on people. Is it a slur campaign to stop people going on holiday to Egypt?

Well I have to say no. That the big point of this whole passage is that God will be God and everyone will know it.

God will be God and everyone will know it. And I want to show you six really quick things to show you where I get this from. Here's the first. God is proving he is the Lord.

God is proving he is the Lord. So helpful to have the text in front of you. Chapter 7 verse 17 this is what God 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 to blood.

Chapter 8 verse 10 Moses replied it will be as you say so that you may know there is no one like the Lord our God.

[12 : 31] Chapter 9 verse 14 Or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.

God is saying I'm the Lord. I'm in charge I'm sovereign there's no one like me I'm utterly unique completely distinct no one like me I'm in absolute control of absolutely everything and what I say happens and no one can stand against me I am the grand fromage and before me Pharaoh is just a poor sniveling ruler God is proving he's unequalled unparalleled undisputed uniquely supreme he's the sovereign soul all knowing and all powerful ruler of all the earth that's what he's communicating to Egypt and his people also these aren't arbitrary acts he's not just gone to his conjuring case and pulled out some interesting tricks every single one of these plagues is an attack on an Egyptian God so Canaan and Happy and Osiris are gods associated with the Nile

Uetik is God of the flies and Yahweh seems to control the flies not Uetik Nut is the God of the sky Isis and Seth are God of agriculture and Shu is God of the weather particularly Heo and yet it seems that Yahweh has got that completely at his beck and court and that these gods are nothing but the invention of men and then there's Re and Ammon Re and Aten and Atom and Horus all gods of the sun and yet are completely powerless when God turns the lights out can do absolutely nothing this is what God is saying about himself I am God and you will need to know it God will be God and everyone will know it it's the second thing we see that God is producing worshippers it's probably the most famous line in the book of Exodus where Moses repeatedly stands before Pharaoh and says hopefully he said it with a bit more enthusiasm than that because otherwise Pharaoh would never let them go he says let my people go and that's where we think it stops but every single time he says it he follows it up with another phrase let my people go so that they may worship me let my people go so that they may worship me just look with me at chapter 10 verses 1 and 2 then the Lord said to Moses go to Pharaoh for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these signs of mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them

and that you may know that I am the Lord see God is revealing himself to two sets of people he's revealing himself to the Egyptians saying that all your gods are completely useless compared to me but he's also giving his people reasons to worship him they've been in

Egypt 400 years they've never seen God act like this and now they know that their God controls hail and frogs can turn off the sun whenever he wants and they go do you know what he's real and he's worth worshipping I can't wait to get home and tell my children about this and when they have children the grandchildren and we'll have family devotion times just worshipping God because he's awesome and unparalleled in all the earth do you see what God is saying he's saying God will be God and everyone will know it everyone will know it Israelites and Egyptians alike there's also something really brilliant going on that we see God is providing grace God is providing grace a plague four with the flies something new happens the

[17:20] Nile blood frogs everywhere midges annoying and then a plague four something really different happens look at chapter 8 verse 22 but that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen where my people live no swarms of flies will be there so that you will know that I the Lord am in this land look at chapter 9 verse 4 love the sound of rustling pages but the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die chapter 9 verse 26 once you see these things they're everywhere the only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen where the Israelites were chapter 10 verse 23 no one could see anyone else or move about for three days yet all the

Israelites had light in the places where they lived do you see how God is gracious to his people see how he makes a distinction that because they're his people they don't suffer these mighty acts of judgment that are coming on the land they're safe he's looking out for them they don't deserve it we've already seen that they're a moany bunch of disbelieving quasi-Egyptians but yet God is so gracious to them he makes a distinction that his people are safe and everyone else suffers he pours out grace on undeserving people saving them from judgment purely because they're his people credible truth isn't it judgment comes and God's people are safe in Exodus they're safe by being found in ethnic

Israel today you are safe when judgment comes fully and finally not if you're an ethnic Israelite but if by faith you've trusted the Lord Jesus that is a sure and certain promise you can take to the bank every day of the week and when judgment comes fully and finally the only safe place is the Lord Jesus I was really disappointed at Christmas because Rupert Murdoch brought all the rights to the film Elf which is my absolute favorite film and I love that bit when Santa comes to the department store and what does Buddy the Elf say Santa I know him that's what's held out to us in the Lord Jesus that when judgment comes we're not on the receiving end because we know God God and we've trusted his son that's open to anyone who will come God will be God and everyone will know it point number four God is proclaiming sovereign power and mercy to go back to chapter 9 verse 15 for by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth do you see how God is merciful that he's judging them but he's not wiping them off the earth his judgment is supposed to be corrective not merely punitive he is trying to address their view of who God is that he really is the Lord and therefore these judgments come and they're terrible but they're not as bad as they could have been because he says at the click of my fingers

I could have sent hail and Egypt would have been confined to the almanac of history he relents from destroying Egypt he gives them space for grace it's like the parable of the wheat and tares where God allows both the wheat that is his and the tares that aren't his to grow up together without bringing final judgment so there might be real hope do you know what we look out on our world and things are pretty bleak but they're not as bad as they could have been they're not as horrendous if God didn't have his restraining hand over the world keeping it in check he does this in four ways I think he gives us a conscience Romans 2 so people aren't as bad as they could otherwise be he's given us the Holy Spirit who convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment kind of amplifying that work of the conscience the witness of the church he says is like salt and light in the world and civil authority that we learnt about last Sunday night in

[22:49] Romans 13 God is restraining the world from being as bad as it could be in order to allow space for grace so that when final judgment comes people will trust his son and find grace and safety you see this is what it's all about God will be God everyone will know it the key is will we know it now will we trust it now will we turn to him now number five we're nearly done you've

listened well God is probing Pharaoh's hearts you can almost say that this whole passage is almost like a battle for one heart Pharaoh's heart there's lots of different ways that Pharaoh's heart is hardened it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart it says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened and it says God hardened Pharaoh's heart three different ways going on and in fact it says each of them four times

Puritans had this great phrase the sun that melts the wax also hardens the clay the more times we hear that God is God and everyone will know it but we don't respond in repentance and faith and get with the program we become resistant and in Pharaoh's life that resistance is built up to such a point there's real urgency because your heart does become calcified and impenetrable God will be God and absolutely everyone will know last point and then we're done God is provoked by false repentance God is provoked by false repentance Pharaoh is a classic case of what it means to repent wrongly to be sorrow filled but not turn to

God let me give you these chapter 8 verse 15 but when Pharaoh saw that there was relief he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron just as the Lord had said do you see what it was relief not repentance he wanted an easier life but not God himself so he doesn't turn to God he just wants to turn away from his suffering relief not repentance is false repentance just want things slightly easier than they already are look at chapter 8 verse 25 then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said go sacrifice to your God here in the land verse 28

Pharaoh said I will not let you go to offer sacrifices to the Lord your God in the wilderness but you may not go very far now pray for me or chapter 10 verse 8 then Moses and Aaron said then Moses and Aaron will walk back to Pharaoh go worship the Lord your God he said but tell me who will be going Moses answered we will be going with our young and our old with our sons and our daughters and with our flocks and herds because we are to celebrate a festival to the Lord Pharaoh said the Lord will be with you if I let you go along with your women and children clearly you are bent on evil no let only the men go and worship the Lord he's bargaining not obeying he's becoming convinced that God really is God but rather than get with the program and turn to him he says let it be on my terms let it be only if it's how I want it to be just a few men and a few women and repentance is a call for unconditional surrender and then chapter 9 verse 27 then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron this time

I have sinned he said to them the Lord is right and I and my people are in the wrong pray to the Lord for we have had enough thunder and hail I will let you go you don't have to stay any longer verse 34 when Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped he sinned again he and his officials hardened their hearts last way to falsely repent to confess but to continue to confess but to continue he says surely I have sinned so he's turning away from sin but when it gets better it's not a 180 turning to God he simply just does a 360 and turns back to sin false false repentance relief not repentance bargaining not obeying confessing but continuing I wonder if that's true in your life stuff going on that you've not turned from to God you keep it as a little pet you feed it from time to time

[28 : 23] I wonder if that's what God's saying to us this morning confess turn trust classic case is the prodigal son he's in the field what does it say he got up from the slop of his life and he turns around and he goes home that's what repentance is turning from sin to God and anything that's not true repentance provokes God here's what we learnt God will be God and everyone will know it God will be God and everyone will know what does this look like in life well if you're a Christian here today this morning perhaps it is that your worship for God has become dry and dusty maybe it's a case like the Egyptian the Israelites had to to remember what God had done for them to remember how he had blessed them and blessed them and shown his mighty power in Egypt that he gave them reasons to worship perhaps this week to not have dry and dusty and cerebral worship of

God perhaps that's it every morning just rehearse and remember everything that God has done for you there's a passage on the back of the outline that will be so helpful from a guy called Jerry Bridges perhaps it is that God is a passenger in your life you like having him around but he's not really driving it perhaps today is the day to hand over the keys to your life perhaps there's stuff in your life that's habitual set just keep feeding it you've tried but you've failed perhaps today you turn from it once and for all and ask for help from people around but perhaps you're not a Christian so great you're here you have a little window into everything that we're about God has and is revealing himself to us he's done it in this passage doing it all the time he's showing you that he really is God and it's vital that you know it he's done this most profoundly and poignantly in his son the Lord

Jesus the one who is the image of the invisible God want to know what God is like look at the Lord Jesus no there's space for grace in the present space for grace you're living and breathing today and that is an extension of God's grace grace to you but one day judgment will come that will make these plagues in Egypt look like absolute child's play when God rolls up history brings everything to a close and judges the world in righteousness and justice there's only one safe place to be found and that is having trusted Jesus with all of your life and your eventual death judgment will fall and the one thing that will matter on that day is do you know him do you know him says in the Psalms today if you harden your heart today if you hear his voice don't harden your hearts pray that would be true for each of us why don't we just have a minute silence let's just think about what God is calling us to do this morning as he declares into our lives

I am God you must know it there's that story isn't there of six blind men touching an elephant and they all have different impressions about what the elephant is like one person touches the trunk and says it's like a snake one person touches the tail and says it's like a rope one person touches the stomach and says it's like a wall it's a really interesting story but there's three massive problems with it as the narrator of the story you're claiming to be the only one that can see fully which is slightly arrogant I think the Hindu proverb is that this is like God we've all got slightly different impressions of what he's like and yet to say it's an elephant is a real problem because you're claiming to be the only one to see the whole picture the second massive problem is if the elephant whispers to all six of them by the way

I'm an elephant then their own perception of the elephant is wholly wrong number three if the elephant is a miracle working elephant and miraculously gives them sight in order that they can see that it is an elephant then to keep going in darkness is just utterly wrong and arrogant today God has clearly revealed himself to us what he's like he's shown us the God that he is and he's held up for us the Lord Jesus whom he sent and so to carry on in absolute darkness and do absolutely nothing about it it's real arrogance and it will be a real problem in the end let me pray father father father god thank you you're a god who speaks who longs to be known who is not far from any one of us father god may each of us turn to you in repentance and faith this day and embrace your son as lord of lords and lord of our lives father we pray this in Jesus mighty name amen so you so so