

Text: Exod. 9:1-7

Title: "Something heavy and someone hard"

Time: 7/26/2020 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We have come this morning to the fifth of the ten plagues that the Lord brings upon Egypt to deliver His people from the bondage of slavery. It is announced by the Lord as a plague from His own hand that will kill livestock (v. 3). As such, it is the first plague that threatens the possessions of Egyptians. The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:9-10, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.") and an idol that keeps man from God (2 Tim. 3:2-4, "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous . . . lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."). This plague destroys objects of love.

It was a cattle plague that gave birth to the first veterinarian school in Lyon, France. Some 200 million cattle would die between 1711 and 1769 from a disease known as rinderpest and from other diseases, but in 1761 a Frenchman named Claude Bourgelat founded the first school that began to train men to deal with this problem scientifically. At the time, you could complete your medical training at this school in less than a year, and the results of these efforts brought an end to the spread of these diseases in France [<https://cvm.msu.edu/vetschool-tails/rinderpest-and-the-first-veterinary-school>; 7/23/20].

On March 13 *The Mercury News* of San Jose, CA published a story that headlined the Bay Area as the heaviest concentra-

tion of corona virus in the country. The story said their concentration of the disease was heavy because the area had 4 of the nation's 11 cases.

Current statics available now say that our country has experienced just over 4MM confirmed cases of the virus plague, from which just under 150M people have died. Our definition of "heavy concentration" has certainly changed in a few short months. Let's continue our prayers for the sick, for the vulnerable, and for those endeavoring to help them.

The Lord tells Pharaoh that this plague will be a grievous murrain (KJV; v. 3). *Murrain* is just an older word for animal disease, and the word *grievous* is related to one of the words these chapters have been using to describe Pharaoh's hard heart (v. 7). It is the one that means *heavy*. So in this fifth plague, we once again see two heavy things in a metaphorical sense: (1) a heavy concentration of disease among Egyptian livestock, and (2) the hardened heart of an Egyptian Pharaoh that is too heavy to be moved to change.

I have titled the message this morning, "Something heavy and someone hard," and I want us to notice three specific truths from this passage about the clash between this heavy disease and Pharaoh's heavy hard heart.

I. The heavy plague came after a gracious warning that someone hard refuses to obey (vv. 1-3).

Illustration: One of the tragedies of the corona virus outbreak was China's failure to warn the world of the coming danger. *Wired.com* published a story in May titled, "Inside the Early Days of China's Coronavirus Coverup: The dawn of a pandemic – as seen through the news and social media posts that vanished from China's internet." The article de-

tails double-digit media postings that were censored by China's government in the early days of the pandemic.

One of the vanished media posts is described there this way: "On February 26, Caixin [a prominent Chinese news outlet] published an article called 'Tracing the Gene Sequencing of the Novel Coronavirus: When was the Alarm Sounded?' It offered a detailed timeline of the outbreak. According to Caixin's reporting, the provincial health commission began actively suppressing scientists' knowledge about the virus as early as January 1. . . .

"By January, according to Caixin, a gene sequencing laboratory in Guangzhou had discovered that the novel virus in Wuhan shared a high degree of similarity with the virus that caused the SARS outbreak in 2003; but, according to an anonymous source, Hubei's health commission promptly demanded that the lab suspend all testing and destroy all samples. On January 6, according to the deleted Caixin article, China's National Center for Disease Control and Prevention initiated an 'internal second-degree emergency response' – but did not alert the public. Caixin's investigation disappeared from the Chinese internet only hours after it was published.

"When asked to comment on the Caixin story, China's CDC responded, 'We have made sure to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak as efficiently as possible and do not condone news reports that accused our center of mishandling the crisis.'"

The story noted what it is like to be a journalist in China: "Among journalists and social critics in China, the 404 error code, which announces that the content on a webpage is no longer available, has become a badge of honor. 'At

this point, if you haven't had a 404 under your belt, can you even call yourself a journalist?' a Chinese reporter, who requested anonymity, jokingly asked me." [<https://www.wired.com/story/inside-the-early-days-of-chinas-coronavirus-coverup/>; 7/24/2020]

Application: There is no coverup when it comes to the plagues of Egypt. Once again, the Lord sends Moses into Pharaoh with a gracious warning designed to let Pharaoh know that the plague is coming and to give him a very simple way to avoid this judgment (v. 1). This warning contains truths that every sinner does well to take very seriously, for they are the key to us all escaping God's judgment.

Truth #1 - The true God is "the LORD God of the Hebrews" (v. 1). Why spend so much time Sunday after Sunday with the plagues of Egypt? Why study the Old Testament at all? Very simply - the true God is the LORD God of the Hebrews. If you do not know the God of the Old Testament, you do not know the true God. The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are One in the same.

The apostle Paul put this truth this way (Rom. 9:4-5): "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." When Jesus wanted his disciples to know who He was, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27; see also John 5:46-47). Simply put, the God who warns Pharaoh about the coming fifth plague is the One who had promised to come and die for the sin of sinners so that men like Pharaoh could be saved.

Truth #2 - The true God should be worshipped (v. 1). Pharaoh keeps God's people from worshipping in this passage. In our day, love for self, love for money, and love for pleasure more than love for God are the key culprits (2 Tim. 3:1-4). Obedient worship comes from a love for God that is greater than these other loves.

Truth #3 - Man's true problem is his persistent refusal of God's will (v. 2). We have problems, don't we? How often does it occur to us that it is our sin that is our main problem? Pharaoh was having the same trouble in this passage. Our own sin is always our primary problem. Our only hope for a solution to our primary problem is forgiveness from a sufficient Savior from our sin.

Truth #4 - God's hand is on everything (v. 3). It was God's hand that fed the livestock, that gave them water to drink and air to breathe, that caused them to give birth and multiply, and that would now decide that they would die so that man could see his sin, his need for repentance, and his need for salvation. God's hand is on the livestock and on the virus that would soon infect them. God's hand is on every tiny spec of corona virus. He is in control of all that we face, and we ought to fear and trust Him more than we fear a disease or trust those who are trying to tell us what to do about the disease. Let's not live life as though God's hand were somehow not on everything. The heavy disease came after a gracious warning that someone hard refuses to obey. But we do not have to be that someone as we hear the truths of God's gracious warning this morning.

II. The heavy plague graciously promises what someone hard hopes to disprove (vv. 4, 6b-7a).

Application: Once again, the LORD God of the Hebrews highlights for Pharaoh the way in which He deals different-

ly with His people. The children of Israel do not lose a single animal, whereas all the livestock of Egypt that had been infected with the disease died (v. 6b; note, however, that some were spared from infection – see v. 19). Among Egyptian cattle, there was a 100% infection mortality rate.

Illustration: We have learned to talk about infection mortality rates in recent months. In the US, my last look at the statistics from Google said that there were 147,000 deaths from covid-19 and 4.12 million confirmed cases. That is an infection mortality rate of about 3.6%. The *New York Times* reported last month that 42% of US deaths happen in a nursing home while only 8% of the confirmed cases do. So in a nursing home, the infection mortality rate is 18.7%, and outside a nursing home the infection mortality rate is 2.2%.

What is different about Pharaoh's reaction to the news about the 100% infection mortality rate of Egyptian livestock is that his primary concern is not to see what might be done to prevent the disease from spreading further, but rather to send someone to the Israel herds so that he could find just one sick animal that could disprove what God had said would happen. Is that not the knee-jerk sinful reaction of unbelief that comes so naturally to the human heart?

It is interesting that for Pharaoh, seeing was believing, but then still not believing to the point that it changed his mind about repenting. Faith is far more about the will than it is about the facts. Did you know that the phrase *seeing is believing* is unbiblical? Biblically, we need to believe when we are not able to see. The Book of Hebrews defines believing this way: "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It is when lives of faith live in such a way that demonstrates their hope and faith in God's promises, the fulfillment of which has not yet been seen, that the

truth of those promises obtain the support of substantial evidence. Simply hearing God's Word must be believing.

III. The heavy plague graciously waits in a day during which someone hard refuses to change (vv. 5-6a, 7b).

Application: Our passage teaches us the spiritual importance of today. Paul put it this way: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2b). Your day of salvation, if it ever comes, will come on a day you call *today*, not on the day you call *tomorrow*. Jesus quotes the foolishness of the rich man who waited for tomorrow, for his salvation could only happen today: "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said unto him, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?'" Only today is the day of salvation, because every tomorrow we may reach in God's patient grace becomes a today when we reach it. In our passage the heavy plague graciously waits in a day during which someone hard refuses to change. Does that describe you today?

Conclusion: Pharaoh and all Egypt with him find themselves between a rock and a hard place. The rock is God's judgment in a heavy plague, and the hard place is the hardness of Pharaoh's heart, too heavy to be moved to change. As sinners, we need to see that we too begin in a place like that. We are stuck between God's judgment against our sin on one hand, and our hard-hearted unbelief and unwillingness to repent on the other.

What can save us from being caught in between these? It cannot be God's refusal to judge sin, for God is holy. That righteous rock of the just demands of God's holy law will

never move. But what about the hard place of our unbelieving heart? By God's grace, the Spirit's power, and the sacrifice of God's Son on the cross, that hard place can be moved. Our part is to repent from the heavy immovability of our unbelief, and to recognize our desperate need to trust Christ, who died for sins and rose again for our life, to save us. Pharaoh once again chooses wrongly. His heart hardens again. He refuses to believe. He will not repent, nor send the people away to worship.

What shall we do as we contemplate the Lord's commands to us? They have come to us after a gracious warning, pointing graciously to a promise we have often doubted or even tried to disprove, and during a day when God's judgment patiently waits until tomorrow. When our soul is required of us, we will be the fool Jesus spoke of?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*