

# Sin Is No Trifling Matter

## Pray

Help me, O Lord, to see the exceeding sinfulness of this world through Your eyes. Then, use me, I pray.

## Read

EXODUS 9:27—10:6

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace...” (Rom. 3:23). Reflect on all he has forgiven you.

**THINK FURTHER** • The time for intercession is now over. God’s judgment can no longer be delayed (Rev. 10:6). We are told this time that it was God who hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Pharaoh had shown nothing but contempt for God’s patience, and had refused to repent. There was nothing now to avert God’s judgment (Rom. 2:5), and Pharaoh’s vague offer to do a deal with Moses was no more than an attempt to pacify the growing rebellion among his own officials.

But how can we relate to and apply this whole plague narrative to modern Western society in particular, in which experience of both magic and miracle has been very limited? God in his graciousness can make himself known, and his message relevant, in whatever context people find themselves. In our sophisticated and very materialistic society it may sometimes be less relevant to emphasize the themes of the miraculous and magical. We need to understand that what is at

the heart of the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh is a power struggle between God and the forces of evil—which in our society could be seen especially in the forces of overt and unadulterated materialism. Though we do not doubt that the events leading up to the Exodus contained both miracle and magic, the words used for “sign” (Hebrew *oht*) and miracle (Hebrew *mowphet*, ie “power”) do not of necessity carry that emphasis any more than the equivalent words used in the New Testament. The “powers” which the “modern” world recognizes are largely science, economics and politics, and God is able to reveal his presence, his righteousness, and his supremacy in these areas as clearly as he did in the area of the supernatural, which was key to the thinking of ancient Egypt.

**APPLICATION** • God so loved that he gave his most precious gift to offer salvation to a sinful world. Rethink John 3:16. What are you willing to give to bring salvation to a sinful world?

## Pray

Open my eyes, Lord, so that in seeing clearly the world I live in, I will be moved and led by Your Spirit to do all I can to further the coming of Your Kingdom.

# Till Seventy-seven Times

## Pray

Lord, help me remember that as I forgive others, so You will forgive me (Matt. 5:14).

## Read

EXODUS 10:7-29

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • Are you willing to forgive the same person seventy-seven times? How many times has God forgiven you?

**THINK FURTHER** • Until the Lord declares the finality of his judgment, our calling is to mirror his patience and his yearning for people's response, both in our intercession (2 Cor. 5:20) and in our witness (Gen. 18:23-33). That point has now been reached in the Exodus narrative, and we are told this time that it was God who hardened Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh had shown nothing but contempt for God's patience, and had refused to repent. He may seem briefly to relent, but his statement is vague, contradictory, and again most likely to be duplicitous. What was behind the seeming acknowledgement that God was with the Israelites, or that he would be with them once they were outside the area where Pharaoh claimed to have his own political, military and even divine control? The turn of events was forcing Pharaoh to take cognizance of the power of the God of Israel. Yet, with supreme folly, he thought that that power could be subordinated to his own, provided he could keep Israel's majority—the

women, children and livestock—as a kind of hostage to ensure the men's return (10,11). After the plague of darkness, Pharaoh played his last card in wanting to hold onto Israel's wealth, its livestock, believing that by this kind of economic blockade he could subdue Moses' and Aaron's demands for the people's freedom (24). Among the worldly-wise money talks, but it must not be allowed to become the bartering currency of the Kingdom of God.

Feeling totally humiliated, and having no more options, Pharaoh lashed out with typical empty arrogance, and in ending all contact with Moses and Aaron, he closed down all communication with God. **APPLICATION** • Think of the things which hardened Pharaoh's heart. How have you seen the desire for power and wealth harden hearts today? Are you seeking first his Kingdom and trusting the one who understands your weaknesses (see Heb. 4:15,16)? How can you help someone today, who has been "hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Heb. 3:12,13)?

## Pray

Lord, help me to "fix [my] thoughts on Jesus" so that my heart will not "be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Make me an "encourager" to someone today.

# A Living Demonstration

## Pray

Lord, help me to be a “living demonstration” of one who knows, loves, and serves You.

## Read

EXODUS 11:1-10

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • How do your uncommitted friends see you? There are good reasons for us to be concerned about our reputation (1 Tim. 3:7).

**THINK FURTHER** • Despite what was said in 10:29, Moses, without any preliminary announcement, appears before Pharaoh with the simple announcement “This is what the Lord says—and this is what he is about to do.” Here there are no more “ifs or buts”; no room for negotiation, not even for a change of mind. The Lord, in preparation for Israel’s mighty deliverance, has done two things. First, he has caused the Egyptian people to recognize God’s hand upon Israel, and therefore become favorably and generously disposed towards them. Second, he has so isolated Pharaoh in his stubbornness that he will not just have to let Israel go; rather, after one final act of rebellion, he will have to plead with Israel to leave his land.

We may want to question why the whole Egyptian people had to suffer such tragic bereavements, especially as many among their leadership were already responding to the words of Moses (9:20) and the ordinary people had become favorably disposed to

Israel. But we have only to look around us to see the reality of this experience. How many peoples are suffering because of the failure of their leaders? How many innocent families are suffering because of a drunken driver? That is what makes evil truly evil. If only the sinner suffered as a result of their sin, sin would not, at least from a human point of view, be all that bad. But it so often leaves a swath of suffering to otherwise uninvolved people. We must take responsibility for the effect our lives have on others, for good or for bad; this is part of our being our brothers’ keeper (Gen. 4:9,10). This is especially true for those who are in leadership positions, but it is a truth we must all live by.

**APPLICATION** • “Your faith in God has become known everywhere” (1 Thess. 1:8b). Is your faith in God “known everywhere”? Those you live, work, socialize with? Do you take seriously your part in being your “brother’s keeper”? Is there anything in your life you need to change?

## Pray

Lord, help me to stay faithful and true to You, so that all may see Your likeness in me. May I recognize my responsibilities in being my “brother’s keeper.”

# Be Alert

## Pray

Help me, Lord, to be still before You and wait patiently for the unfolding of Your Word for me.

## Read

EXODUS 12:1-20

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • Worship can sometimes become falsely soothing; it should prepare us for action.

**THINK FURTHER** • The Passover meal is central to the faith of both Jews and Christians. It is the celebration, affirmation, and reminder that we are a redeemed people. For Israel, it is foundational for its self-understanding as a redeemed people set apart as a priestly nation to be God's treasured possession in order to reveal his character to the world (19:3-6). For Christians, it is also a sign of our deliverance from slavery to sin, celebrated as we participate in the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:15-20). Sadly, the biblical picture of Jesus as the Lamb of God is too often sentimentalized in Christian devotion as if he were a cuddly little lamb. A year-old ram is at the height of its virility and power, as such it is not to be easily trifled with, and is roughly equivalent in age to a man of 30 years. As Dorothy L Sayers wrote, in *Creed or Chaos*, "We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him 'meek and mild,' and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale

curates (pastors) and pious old ladies."

The biblical significance of leaven is too often narrowed to simply a picture of sin. Certainly it is that in some New Testament verses (1 Cor. 5:6-8), but it is equally a picture of the Kingdom of God growing imperceptibly in an alien world (Matt. 13:33). Here, unleavened bread is a picture of the urgency of the preparation for departure, and the way in which it was to be eaten is symbolic of the Christian as a soldier ready for action in Ephesians ch. 6.

**APPLICATION** • How well are you clothed in the "armor of God" (see Eph. 6:13-17)? To "be strong in the Lord," the full armor is needed. How well will you be "clothed" as you go out today?

## Pray

Lord, I want to be "strong in the Lord," so I may "stand against the devil's schemes." Before I face the world today, may I "put on the full armor of God."

# O Lord...Awesome in Glory

## Pray

I thank You, O God, that I am justified by faith in Christ. Help me to understand all that means.

## Read

EXODUS 12:21-36

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • “How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth” (Psa. 47:2). And to think he loves us!

**THINK FURTHER** • Much of the early part of today’s reading is a recap. The Israelites, having found the favor of the Egyptians and been given many gifts, now create great fear among them. However, this does imply a change of mind. Whenever the people of God live up to their calling they often create this kind of paradoxical reaction of admiration and fear among the surrounding populace. It happened in the young Jerusalem church after the Ananias and Sapphira judgment. Luke records various paradoxical reactions: no one else dared join them, though they were highly regarded by the people; nevertheless, more and more people believed in the Lord and were added to their number (Acts 5:1-14).

Moses is aware that this deliverance was going to become one of the foundational experiences in the story of Israel’s development. Israel’s remembrance was not to become merely the remembrance of a past event but the reliving of the continuing experience of God’s act of redemption. These words are

used at every Passover celebration. In every generation each Jew must see him or herself as having personally come forth from Egypt, as it is written: “On that day tell your son, ‘I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt’” (13:8). We need to look at our redemption in the same way. How do we answer the question in the old spiritual, *Were you there when they crucified my Lord?* Historically, of course, the answer is “no”—the death and resurrection of Jesus was a once-for-all event, 2,000 years ago. But experientially, the answer must be “yes,” for the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are not only once-for-all, but also timeless events in which we continue to share daily (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10,11).

**APPLICATION** • How well are you telling your children, and other young people, what the Lord has done for you? Will they see in your life a godly example that they can follow? Is there someone I can share my story with today?

## Pray

Thank You, Lord, for deliverance from the sins of my past. Help me to be faithful in telling the younger generation all You have done for me.

# A Good Reputation

## Pray

Lord, may Your Word to me today be an example and a challenge for my own life's journey.

## Read

EXODUS 12:37-51

## Meditate

CONSIDER • "Be very careful then, how you live...making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15,16).

THINK FURTHER • As the Exodus journey begins we note that in spite of the urgency and danger of their departure, the people's concern is not totally turned in upon themselves. They take "many other people" with them (38). No doubt some of these were the Egyptians who had been favorably disposed to the Israelites (36); others would have been some of those "officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD" (9:20).

It was from the experience of slavery in Egypt that care for the stranger became central to Israelite spirituality (22:21; 23:9). In civil law they were to have equality with the native-born Israelites (Lev. 19:34). But before they could enter fully into the life of worship and *spiritual* fellowship they would need to enter into covenant relationship with the God of Israel by taking upon themselves the covenant sign of circumcision. Here is a tension that we must maintain, also.

We want to live in a country where all are equal before the law, where freedom to worship according to one's conscience is safe-

guarded. We want porous edges to our church membership so that all feel welcome and it is easy for people to come, to taste and see that the Lord is gracious (Psa. 34:8; 1 Pet. 2:3). But at the same time we need to guard sound doctrine, godly discipline and holy living among our membership. By remaining an open society, Israel frequently allowed itself to be led into strange beliefs and pagan practices and so came under the judgment of God. Yet it continued to keep its borders and society open to all in need. How can we work this out in our country, our society, and our church?

APPLICATION • Make that question personal. What can you do to guard your country, society and church from false doctrines, and yet show a loving invitation to all people? Is your life true to God's Word and an example of true godliness?

## Pray

Lord, may others see clearly the change in my life that You have made and be drawn to want to know and follow You, also.