

Exodus 035  
Perils of Prosperity  
Exodus 9:33-35  
March 8, 2026  
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Let us take our Bibles this morning and open them to Exodus 9:33. We will be taking a look at Exodus 9:33-35 this morning. The title of our message is "The Perils of Prosperity."

We are continuing our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Exodus. God, in the first half of the book, is redeeming a nation. He has raised up His man of the hour, Moses, the one whom He will use in this great effort. What we have been studying as of late are the plagues that God is bringing forth on Egypt through Moses.

We have seen the Nile to blood, the multiplication of frogs, gnats, flies, death of livestock, and boils. We find ourselves in Exodus 9:13-35 concerning the hail judgment that has now come upon Egypt.

What happens at the very end of this chapter (Exodus 9:33-35), which is what we are going to look at this morning, is that Moses, at Pharaoh's request and through God's power, reverses the judgment. We see the plague ceasing (Exodus 9:33). Pharaoh's hardening (Exodus 9:34), and Pharaoh's refusal to let the children of Israel go (Exodus 9:35).

Hail (Exodus 9:13-35)

- I. God's Instructions (13-16)
- II. God's Prediction (17-21)
- III. Prophecy's Fulfillment (22-26)
- IV. Pharaoh's Reaction (27-32)
- V. Moses' Reversal (33-35)
  - A. Plague ceases (33)
  - B. Pharaoh's hardening (34)
  - C. Pharaoh's refusal (35)

Notice first of all the ceasing of the of the plague:

*"So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread out his hands to the Lord; and the thunder and the hail ceased, and rain no longer poured out on the earth" (Exodus 9:32).*

The operative words being, "he spread out his hands to the Lord." The incredible power that we possess through intercessory prayer can really not be quantified. We have a

tendency to look at ourselves as powerless in a world that is very wicked and evil. Things are out of control, and we really think we have no power to stop things. That is true in and of ourselves.

Outside of God's will we have very limited power, but there is a power that we do have called intercessory prayer. This is spoken of in James 5:16:

*"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16).*

Some English translations say it "availeth much."

James gives some examples:

*"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit" (James 5:17-18).*

He was just a normal guy, this guy, Elijah. He put his shoes on one foot at a time, just like the rest of us.

Here is this ordinary guy who is able to alter meteorology through intercessory prayer, and to alter weather through intercessory prayer. Jesus in Luke 18:1 says that men ought not to faint, but they ought to pray.

I know that in my own personal life, carving aside that time to pray is probably the most difficult part of my Christianity. Satan would love you to be running around with all kinds of Christian activity—things that in and of themselves are not necessarily bad, they are just activities that consume a lot of time and energy—if it means you will not pray, because prayer is where the power is.

Moses was a fallible human being, and yet he was able to stop this plague of hail as he spread out his hands to the Lord. The power of prayer is not in the person that prays; it is in God's hand that moves. That is where the power comes from. Yet God, for whatever reason, has chosen to move His hand, I would not say in every case, but in many cases, through the prayers and the petitions of His people.

*"If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14).*

God is not obligated to answer prayer requests that are outside of His will. Of course, you would not want a prayer request answered that is outside of His will.

You do not want things happening in your life that are outside of His will. God does not grant us things that are outside of His will, but the prayer within His will has tremendous

potency and power. I have noticed that when I pray within His will, the answer does not always come on my timetable, but when it comes, it is oftentimes bigger than anything I even prayed for to begin with. It is an amazing thing that we have.

Moses is experiencing this as he is walking with the Lord here. You will notice that Moses could do something that Pharaoh's magicians could not do. Pharaoh's magicians could imitate the first couple of plagues in the Book of Exodus. Pharaoh's magicians were able to imitate water to blood and the multiplication of frogs throughout the land of Egypt. When it got to number three with the dirt becoming gnats, Pharaoh's magicians operating under occultic power said, "We cannot do that one. That is a hand of God" (Exodus 8:16-19).

What made that third one different? It was a miracle that dealt with a non-living thing turning into a living thing. Then came the frogs. That dealt with a living thing becoming more living things; the gnats were different because that was a non-living thing, becoming a living thing. That is vertical and only God can do that. The magicians said, "This is the hand of God. This is the finger of God." They had power to a certain point, but they could not turn something non-living into living. They could not go vertical. Even though they had a lot of power to do a lot of different things, they could not stop a plague.

Plague number one, they imitated. Plague number two, they imitated. Plague number three, they tried to imitate and did not get very far. They could never do a U-turn; they could never do a reversal. Moses was able to do the reversal through intercessory prayer to God. Who really had the power in this whole exchange? We have a tendency to look at people as really having the power, but Moses had the power because his power was rooted in God.

**Satanic/Demonic Miracles**

1. Exod. 7-8		7. Acts 8:9; 16:16
2. Deut. 13:1-3		8. Gal. 1:6-9
3. Job 1:12-19; 2:7-8		9. 2 Thess. 2:9
4. 1 Sam. 28?		10. 2 Cor. 11:14
5. Matt. 7:21-23; 24:24		11. Rev. 13:3, 13, 15; 16:13-14
6. Luke 4:5		

I have shown you this chart many times about the different satanic or demonic miracles taking place in the Bible. These are all the examples I could find where a miracle happens and God has nothing to do with it. The realm of the satanic, the realm of the

demonic, the realm of the fallen angelic has an awful lot of power, but it does not possess the same power as God possesses.

Moses was dialed into this power because of his relationship to God. He possessed the ultimate power. You do too. The power does not belong to the politicians, the power does not belong to your cantankerous boss or someone in your life that has more popularity and more money and more resources than you have. The ultimate power is yours because you are related to God, and God is the Creator.

All of these other entities are just created beings. We get so confused about this. We look at influencers and successful people and powerful people, and we can go into the fetal position because we are so intimidated by them; the truth of the matter is that if they understood who you serve and who you are related to, they are the ones that should be cowering, not you.

Moses moves into this role where he is taking on the Egyptian pantheon of that time period—the whole power structure. He, by himself, and his brother Aaron, were able to do things that this whole power structure could not do because of his relationship to the Lord. Moses had the ultimate power source at his fingertips, and you have it as well.

We move away from the plague ceasing to Pharaoh's heart hardening. We pick it up in Exodus 9:34:

*"But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants" (Exodus 9:34).*

*"Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go—" (Exodus 9:35).*

If you go back to Exodus 9:27, and you put those two verses together, when the pressure was on, Pharaoh said to Moses, "You can go. You, the Israelites, the children of Israel can leave Egyptian bondage." The moment the pressure stopped, the moment the plague stopped, Pharaoh made a U-turn, a 180 in his mentality. He said, "You cannot go."

This indicates to me that he never was very sincere on the front end. He was sincere as long as the pressure was applied to him. The moment the pressure was taken away from him was the moment that his attitude changed. A lot of people are like that with God. They will seek God when they are in trouble, or when they are having a problem, but the moment the problem disappears is the moment they could really care less about God.

When you go to a doctor and you get that negative doctor report, the prayers pour forth from our lips. But is it not interesting how our prayer life has a tendency to dissipate the

moment the doctor says, "You are completely healthy. There are no issues whatsoever"?

This is what I call the perils of prosperity. It is as if God says to His children, "I have not heard from you in so long, and I want to hear from you. I want to have a relationship with you, but I have not heard from you in so long because your life is going so well. You know what I am going to do? I am going to introduce a problem or two in your life just to hear your voice again through prayer." If you are moving on with your life in prosperity and success and everything is going your direction, the opportunity and even the desire to seek God has a tendency to disappear.

Jesus talked about this over and over again in Matthew 19:23-34. He said this to His disciples:

*"Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 19:23-24).

The rich, as far as God is concerned, are at a real disadvantage, because the rich really have very little incentive to seek God since they are used to buying their way out of their problems. The interesting thing about money is that it cannot replace God in a person's life, but it certainly is the next best alternative or one of the best.

If I was picking alternatives for God, I would pick power, pleasure, and prosperity. Those are some pretty good artificial substitutes. Ultimately, at the end of the day, they will come up empty. As long as a person is clouded with all kinds of prosperity, all kinds of success, all kinds of capacities that they have to buy their way out of their problems, what God is God? He is a footnote in the lives of many people. He is an afterthought.

We have a tendency to look at the rich as if they have all of the advantages. The Bible is actually saying the exact opposite. They are at a tremendous disadvantage, spiritually speaking.

James, the Lord's half brother, wrote this in his little epistle:

*"But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like a flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away"* (James 1:9-11).

"Do you have a brother," James says, "who is in an adverse circumstance financially, in his health, in his career, or relationally?" James says, "That person ought to exalt in

their high position because they are at a point in their life where they are actually seeking God, praying to God, making requests known to God." The rich, on the other hand, have their bills paid. They have got it made in the shade. They are actually fading away, the book of James says, even while they go about their business. That it is a different way of looking at prosperity—the perils of prosperity, the danger of prosperity.

Jesus, in Revelation 2-3 spoke to the various churches in Asia Minor. When He got to Laodicea, He had no word of commendation for Laodicea. To every other church He managed to say something good about them, but not to Laodicea. What was the problem with Laodicea? Too much success, too much of a budget surplus, things were just going too well.

If things are going well, let us just go ahead and have Christianity without Christ. "We have things figured out, Lord. We will check in with You when we need You." Jesus says this to the church at Laodicea:

*""Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"" (Revelation 3:17).*

That is a dangerous place to be in when you have a need before God, but you do not see it and therefore you do not think you need God. Prosperity does that to people.

I cannot think of a harsher critique than those words chosen by Jesus as He speaks to the church at Laodicea, saying, "Number one, you are wretched; number two, you are miserable; number three, you are poor; number four, you are blind; and number five, you are naked. That is not even the worst part of the whole thing, though. The worst part of the whole thing is that you do not even know that those descriptors apply to you. You think you have need of nothing, but you need everything. Your material prosperity is blinding you to your actual need." The perils of prosperity.

We are so resentful to God when the first sign of trouble hits. "God, how could you allow this adverse circumstance or whatever it may be into my life?" When you start to understand the perils of prosperity, you start to look at your troubles completely differently. "Thank You, Lord, for this thorn in the flesh, because this is the very thing that is causing me to seek You. If I did not have this thorn in the flesh, I would really have no incentive to pray to You."

Paul the apostle suffered from a thorn in the flesh. Nobody knows what it was. It is described in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Paul starts looking at it as a gift. What a strange way to look at a problem. That thorn in the flesh was keeping Paul in a usable, dependent condition.

Everyone wants to know the secret of Paul's success. It is unbelievable going to the places Paul went to in the Book of Acts and seeing what Paul was able to bring forth in

God. Everybody is always trying to figure out how he did it. Modern missionaries today, with all of our technological advances, could not single-handedly reproduce what the Apostle Paul did in the Book of Acts.

Was it his education? He was certainly an educated man. Was it his natural gifting? He certainly was a naturally gifted person. Was it his training? He certainly had all that going for him. Was it his understanding of what we call Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament? As a Pharisee he certainly understood that backwards and forwards.

Those things, as important as they are, were not the secret of his success. The secret of his success is given there in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10—this thorn in the flesh, which he asked God three times to remove. Each time God said no. Why didn't God take it away? Why doesn't everybody get healed? Why is it that Christians go through this life many times in a crippled state, either physically or emotionally, or have a very difficult time recovering from some kind of trauma that they have experienced in the past? Why is that?

Why is it, Lord, that the righteous suffer? The answer, at least in Paul's case, was very clear: "That is the secret of your success. If that was not there, you would not be in a place of dependance upon Me. You would be lifted up with pride."

Paul had been caught up to the third heaven. Have you been caught up to the third heaven lately? (It has not happened to me. Not recently, anyway. Not ever, for that matter.) When he was caught up to the third heaven he said, "Was I in my body? Was I out of my body? I do not know, I just know I was caught up." It is something that happened to him 14 years earlier (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

As he is describing that he says, "I heard things that a human being is not fit to hear" (2 Corinthians 12:4). In other words, "I heard things that people do not know naturally, but it was given to me by divine disclosure." Can you imagine the complete arrogance of that man if given privy to that kind of knowledge and insight?

The thing about God is that He loved Paul too much to see him move off into independence and arrogance and self-sufficiency. So he gave him something that, from best accounts, was something crippling. I do not know if it was physical; I do not know if it was emotional; I do not know if it was relational.

It is interesting how the devil is God's devil. God actually used Satan to attack the apostle Paul over and over again. He talks about how "I buffet my body and make it my slave" (1 Corinthians 9:27). When was the last time we buffeted our body? He just kept going back to the Lord. "Take it away, take it away, take it away." The Lord said, "No, no, no, no. I love you too much to see you wander off into independence. You have a destiny." The destiny is the Book of Acts and the 13 Epistles. None of it would have happened without that thorn in the flesh. That, more than any other single thing I can think about, was the secret of Paul's success.

We would be just like Pharaoh without trouble. It is our human nature. We are wired that way in original sin. Pharaoh, as long as the pressure is on, is seeking God. The moment the pressure disappears, Pharaoh could care less about God. He really could care less about the initial promise that he made.

It is interesting as you look at Exodus 9:34, which says:

*"But when Pharaoh saw that the wind and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants" (Exodus 9:34).*

This is a real conundrum. In Exodus 4:21, God says of Pharaoh, *"I will harden his heart."* Here you do not see God hardening Pharaoh's heart; you see Pharaoh hardening his own heart. God as the hardening agent, as far as I can tell, is not even mentioned here in these verses that we are looking at. What an interesting interplay this is between God hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardening his own heart. It is a great study in sovereignty versus free will.

Ed Hindson writes, concerning this expression:

"I will harden his heart. An expression 'to strengthen his will.' The text identifies the heart as the location of the volition, man's decision-making ability. On seven occasions in the narrative, God hardens Pharaoh's heart (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8) or foretells that He will harden Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3), and nine times in the text, Pharaoh hardens his own heart (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34-35). For the initial five plagues, the text registers Pharaoh as the agent of hardening. Not until the sixth plague does God participate in the confirmation of Pharaoh's own volitional choices."<sup>1</sup>

Charles Ryrie says the same thing. His numbers are a little bit different, but both men, commentators that I respect, are teaching this same interplay.

"Exodus 4:21 - 'harden his heart.' Ten times it said that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35; 13:15), and 10 times that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). Paul uses this as an example of the inscrutable will of God and of His mercy towards men (Rom. 9:14-18). Seven times Pharaoh hardened his own heart before God first hardened it, though the prediction that God would do it preceded all."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hindson, E. E., & Mitchell, D. R., eds. (2010). *KJV Bible Commentary for Today: The Most Up-to-Date Commentary on the Time-Honored Text of the KJV*, 86.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, 96.

In Exodus 4:21, you have the prediction of God hardening Pharaoh, and then you see Pharaoh repeatedly hardening his own heart. Then it is not until the sixth plague that God hardens Pharaoh's heart.

A lot of theological systems are really down on the issue of volition, free will. They argue that we do not really have free will. How could we not have free will when we are made in God's image? God has free will to do what He wants. The Fall effaced but did not erase our image-bearing status. You will see that in passages like Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9.

This image-bearing status is revealed very early in the Bible, on the sixth day of Creation (Genesis 1:26-28). It is a power that we have that sometimes I wish we did not have. It is the capacity for choice. If a person wants to make a choice either for God or against God, do you know what God does? Ultimately, He respects the choice. If He were to override the choice and cancel volition, He would be canceling how we are manufactured.

This is one of the greatest powers that you have as a human being, as an image bearer of God. The animals and the plant life do not have this power. They have the "nephesh" or the "psyche" in the sense that they are life bearing, existing entities. They are not image bearers of God like you are. This amazing power that you have is the power of volition, the power to choose.

If a person says no to God over and over again, God finally says, "I respect your choice. You do not want eternal life. You do not have to have it. You want to go into eternal retribution without Me, even though I have given you opportunity after opportunity, then I will respect your choice." I sometimes wish that with some of the choices I have made in my life, good and bad, that I did not have the choice. It would be easier for me if I was a puppet on a string, but that is to deny my humanity. That is to deny who I am.

This is what is going on with Pharaoh. Some passages say God hardened his heart; other passages say he hardened his own heart. It does not say that God hardened his heart until, according to some commentators, until he hardened his own heart six times. God is allowing this whole thing to play out. It is being played out right now as I speak. It is being played out all over the world.

*"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18).*

This is the problem. It is not that they do not know God is there. It is obvious that God exists. We cannot have a design without a Designer. Our universe, our solar system, our cardiovascular system, our muscular system, our skeletal system are so fine-tuned, how can a sane person deny the existence of God? God's existence is as plain as the nose on their face.

Whether they have read a single word of the Bible or not, they know He exists. It is not a lack of information; it is not a lack of knowledge. The problem is that people take what is obvious and hold it down in unrighteousness. That is what upsets God.

*"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them" (Romans 1:18-19).*

Psalm 139 is one of the greatest psalms in the whole Psalter. David says: *"I am fearfully and wonderfully made"* (Psalm 139:14). I look at David, as maybe the text does not say this, and it is a little bit of sanctified imagination. He was a shepherd. He was probably getting ready to go to sleep at night, according to my rendition of things. He put his hand up to his heart, sleeping under a tree, getting ready to nod off. His heart was palpitating and he looked at his stomach, going up and down, inhaling and exhaling. Maybe he was thinking about the meal that he had just had. He looked at the trees and he looked at the stars, and it overtook him that he indeed was fearfully and wonderfully made.

That is the right response to God. It is obvious that God exists, and any sane person would say, "There is something out there bigger than me. God, show Yourself to me." When you start praying like that and when you listen to testimonies, that is what people do.

I always wonder how people come to Christ. It is always somebody saying something like, "I am at the end of my rope. I do not know what to believe. Show me the truth." When you start asking a question like that with sincerity, then Philip shows up and leads the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ (Acts 8). Then you have a situation like Acts 10 where Peter shows up and leads Cornelius and his entourage to Christ.

What do those chapters have in common? Somebody was honestly seeking God. God desires for none to perish but for all to come to salvation (2 Peter 3:9). Sadly, people do not respond that way. There are not a lot of Ethiopian eunuchs out there; there are not a lot of Corneliuses out there. There are a lot of suppressors out there, which is what Romans 1 is saying.

*"Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19-20).*

I was listening to one of our famous atheists in a podcast scenario, and he was asked the question: What are you going to do if you stand before God one day and you find out that this God that you do not think existed, exists after all? This atheist said that he is going to say to God, "Why did You do such a good job concealing Yourself?" I am

thinking to myself, "Conceal Yourself? Are you living in the same universe I am living in?"

God has not concealed Himself. All God is waiting for is a step of honesty in His direction. You do not have to have all of the facts and answers and data. You just have to have a heart that says, "I want to know You. I know You are out there. I know there is something bigger than me." Look at the testimonies of people that pray that prayer. They start to get answers in unparalleled ways.

I ask people all the time (because people follow our ministry online), "How did you find us?" Many times they will say something like this: "I was at the end of my rope. I was being fed a lot of nonsense by the world of religion. I want to know the truth. Across my path came your YouTube channel, podcast sermons, and I have been listening to you for five years." Do you mean that it is not our great marketing that gets the word out to people? No, it is a sincerity of the heart. That is the kind of person that God responds to.

Romans 1 is quite tragic because they suppress the truth. Then you keep reading Romans 1 to the end of the chapter, and you have those frightening words that say: "*God gave them over.*" It says it three times: "God gave them over" (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). He gave them over, for example, to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:28). What is a reprobate mind? A mind that does not think the way it is supposed to.

*"Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7).*

If a person will not fear the Lord, then their mind, which is supposed to function properly under God, cannot think correctly. "*God gave them over to a reprobate mind*" (Romans 1:28, KJV). Do you know why God gave them over to a reprobate mind? Because they gave up on God.

Then it says God gave them over to sexual confusion—total deviance (Romans 1:24). That is our culture, is it not? Why is our culture becoming so sexually deviant? Why is it that they are now talking about pedophilia as a disorder but not a crime? I have quotes from legal professors in the New York Times op ed pieces arguing that. How could you get so confused? Because you gave up on God and God gave you over to what you wanted. This deviance in our culture is an outworking of it.

This is what is going on with Pharaoh. He is hardening his heart against God, and God is giving Pharaoh over to what he wants to do, which I never want for my life. I pray constantly, "God, if I am making bad choices and doing dumb stuff—" That is what sin does to us: it makes us stupid. I had a youth pastor that once said that once: "You will do the dumbest things you will ever do in your life when you are in sin." He is absolutely right. Some of the most illogical things I have ever done relate to times in my life where I am trying to cover up sin or I am involved in sin.

So I say to the Lord, "Lord, if I am going in this direction, keep bothering me; keep agitating me; keep sending the pain signals my direction." I do not want to ever get to a point where I am obtuse to the things of God, because I have been given over to what it is that I want to do. God is respecting my choices.

As you look at the second part of Exodus 9:34, it is not only Pharaoh who is involved in this kind of trajectory away from God; it is also his servants. You see that at the end of Exodus 9:34:

*"He sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants" (Exodus 9:34).*

The Greeks, even today, have a phrase that says, "A fish rots from the head down." Show me the leadership of an organization, show me the leadership of a country, show me the leadership of a culture, and I will be able to tell you where that country and culture and organization is going to be one day.

*"When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,  
But when a wicked man rules, people groan" (Proverbs 29:2).*

Are we doing more today, or are we rejoicing? I think in many ways we are doing an awful lot of groaning because we have people in all kinds of positions of authority that really do not respect God or His principles or His ways at all. Pharaoh did not respect the principles of God, so the nation following Him did not respect the principles of God. This is why biblical leadership is such a big deal.

When you go and vote for people, you vote for people that respect God. Does the person respect God or not? It is not based on how they look or the slickness of their campaign. It is: Are they honoring God with their lifestyle? Are they honoring God with their principles? That ascendancy of proper leadership is what causes a nation to rejoice. The people rejoice when the righteous flourish.

Ed Jones talked earlier about how we are selecting leaders for the church here—elders and deacons. I understand it is another encumbrance on your life to think that through and fill out the form and submit honest requests and submissions. I understand that that stuff can be an irritation. It is just another thing to think about beyond the normal stress and strain of ordinary life, but that process is so significant because Sugar Land Bible Church cannot rise above its leadership.

If you have good leadership, the sky is the limit. If you do not have good leadership, then you are functioning with a disability. I cannot tell you how many organizations and churches, even businesses that I personally am aware of that have the potential for greatness. "This organization could be great," you say to yourself. What is wrong? The leadership is the problem whether in a country, a nation, a church, or a family.

You might be saying to yourself, "I am not a leader. I am not a president. I am not a CEO." I will tell you one thing: you are the head of your home. You have people in your home under your authority—husband, wife. We exert leadership all of the time. Whether those you represent ascend to greatness really relies on, to a large extent, the type of leadership. Not that you are preaching. We can all preach it, but we are role-modeling. We should be role-modeling godliness wherever we go, and influencing people within our sphere of influence everywhere we go.

If that will not happen, then those under you cannot reach their potential either. This is the whole problem with Egypt. This verse stuck out to me like a sore thumb as I was preparing this message: "[Pharaoh] *hardened his heart, he and his servants*" (Exodus 9:34). His servants did exactly what he did.

Look at those qualifications for church leadership. First Timothy 3:1-7 gives qualifications of elders; 1 Timothy 3:8-14 gives qualifications of deacons. Take that process seriously because it will largely determine what kind of church we are six months from now, a year from now, two years from now, five years from now, or ten years from now. May the Lord challenge us all to the endeavor of godly leadership.

We conclude with Exodus 9:35 with Pharaoh's hardening:

*"Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go" (Exodus 9:35).*

I thought you said earlier that they could go. Did we not read that a few Sundays ago?

*"Make supplication to the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer" (Exodus 9:28).*

What happened to that guy? He did a U-turn: *"Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go" (Exodus 9:35).*

What do you do with a guy like this? He is a liar. What the Book of Exodus is trying to show us is that people do this sort of thing. God, by contrast, does not. God is the only source that you can go to over and over again which cannot and will not lie to you.

The Book of James analogizes it to looking at your image in a mirror (James 1:23-24). The interesting thing about a mirror is it does not lie to you. You could be looking great and feeling great, and you could have all of your T's crossed and I's dotted. Do you know what? The mirror will tell you, "Thumbs up today."

Now you could have a bad hair day. You could be miserable. You could have just rolled out of bed or something worse, and you could look right in the mirror, and the mirror will not lie to you. The mirror will tell you when you are happy. It will tell you when you are

sad. The mirror will tell you when you are young, and it is pretty good at telling you when you are old. The mirror will tell you when your hair is dark with no gray in it. It will tell you when there is some gray there. In fact, all of it is gray. In fact, never mind that, you lost all that gray hair a long time ago.

That is what a relationship with God is like. If you want the truth, a lot of times we cannot handle the truth; we do not want to hear the truth.

*"Men loved darkness rather than Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" (John 3:19-20).*

The closer you get to the light, the more it tells you the truth. Truth is the best thing that could ever happen to you.

*"And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).*

Do you want to be set free? I want to be set free. It starts with the truth and you get the truth from God. You do not necessarily get it from a pastor or a preacher, or from elders or deacons. We try our best here to teach the truth, but if you really want the truth, you go to God.

The Word of God will function just like a mirror, and it will tell you the absolute truth whether you want the truth or not. God is the only one that can do that for you. Human beings obviously cannot. Pharaoh being an example. God, on the other hand, gives you the unadulterated truth. Do you know why? Because He cannot lie. It is not just that He cannot lie, but it is impossible for Him to lie.

*"God is not a man, that He should lie" (Numbers 23:19).*

Notice that God is not like a person who can lie. "Pastor, are you saying there are some things God cannot do?" Yes, I am telling you that right now. There are some things God cannot do. God cannot lie. Can God make a rock so big that He cannot move it? No, because God is always sovereign over His creation. There are some things that He will not do, but He cannot do.

*"God who cannot lie" (Titus 1:2).*

*"It is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18).*

Do you remember the movement the "Promise Keepers"? We ought to be promise keepers, but the truth of the matter is, there is only one of those, and that is God. People stay away from church, they stay away from Christians, because they have had a bad experience in church. Someone lied to them. I am thinking to myself, "What were

you expecting? Do people lose their sin nature when they become a member of the church?"

Churches are going to let you down. I have a long list of them in my background. Church leaders will let you down; people that are shepherding you will let you down. God never will.

*"Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar" (Romans 3:4).*

Notice the contrast between people and God:

*"For as many as are the promises of God, in Him are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us" (2 Corinthians 1:20).*

If God said it, you take it right to the bank. If a person said it, you might want to have a healthy dose of skepticism. As Ronald Reagan once said, "Trust but verify." Not with God.

That is one of the things that is being brought up here in the Book of Exodus. The Exodus is occurring, God is keeping a promise that He made to the patriarch Abraham going back about 600 years. Why is this exodus even happening?

*"So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant ["berith"] with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exodus 2:24).*

Who are those guys? That is found in Genesis 15:13-16. Six hundred years earlier, God said that the nation of Israel, which came forth through the patriarch Abraham whose name was later changed to Abraham, was going to go into bondage. They would be in bondage for 400 years, and at the end of that 400-year time period, God would bring them out of bondage with great possessions, and they would plunder the Egyptians (Genesis 15:13-16).

What God is doing here in the Book of Exodus is keeping His word. That is why Exodus 2:24 says, "God remembered His covenant." I thank God that God is this way, because if He can keep His word to the Jew, He can keep His word to you. That is His nature.

The whole subject of Islam is on our minds frequently, but think of living one's life in that deception where you are doing all of these good works, thinking that in the end the bad is going to outweigh the good or the other way around? You may be thinking that you are going to get this pass into heaven because the good outweighs the bad, because your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds.

However, the name Allah means "deceiver." Even if you work and work, and the good outweighs the bad, at any moment Allah can tear the carpet out from under you and you

do not know if you are going to heaven or not. No wonder you have all of these martyrdoms and things like this within Islam, flying planes into buildings. That is the guarantee that you are in. If you do not do that, you do not really know if the carpet's going to be torn out from under you.

Could you imagine living your whole life under that kind of deception? I cannot think of a more horrific way to live. When I look at it this way, rather than being angry at Islam (which I am angry about), it gives you a different perspective towards individual Muslims that are laboring under this deception. I praise the Lord, I do not have to labor under this deception because God cannot lie to me. Everything He promised that He would do for me, He is going to do.

Pharaoh, of course, is the exact opposite. "But what if I mess things up as a Christian? Then what?" You may mess things up, but that does not cancel God's promises to you.

Have you ever been faithless as a Christian? Disobedient? Have you stopped believing? Or stopped doing what God told you to do?

*"If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).*

Do you think Islam enjoys that assurance? Do you think any other religious or belief system on planet earth enjoys that assurance, other than what you receive from the God of the Bible?

If He were to renege on what He has promised to you, He would be denying His very nature. If a Muslim gets the carpet torn out from them on the Day of Judgment, God is honoring that person's nature as a deceiver.

You may start to read this and you may say that this is why there is such a high priority in terms of God's people telling the truth. We should be truthful people, obviously. Ephesians 4:15 says that we are to speak the truth in love, but we ought to also be people of the truth. We ought to be honest and be truthful.

What did Jesus say there in the Sermon on the Mount? "Do not swear by Jerusalem. Do not swear by something greater than yourself" (Matthew 5:34-36). "I swear on my mother's grave that I will do such and such." He says,

*"But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil" (Matthew 5:37).*

As a Christian that is growing in sanctification, my word ought to be so true that I do not have to swear on my mother's grave to get people to believe that I am going to do what I say. It is not because I am some wonderful, righteous person. It is just that I am in a relationship with a God that cannot lie. "Speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

You start to understand why God is going to take His people and put them under a legal system at Mount Sinai. You know the commandments. One of them is, *"You shall not lie"* (Exodus 20:16). Why would I be that way as a Christian? It is not consistent with the God with whom I am in a relationship.

Even if I mess things up and tell a bunch of lies, God will never stop lying. He remains faithful, even if we are faithless, *"for He cannot deny Himself"* (2 Timothy 2:13).

Pharaoh, unlike God, has done an about face here. I think that is the contrast we are supposed to see. Pharaoh does not want to let the children of Israel go. Pharaoh is a type of Satan; Egypt is a type of the bondage that Satan has the world in; Israel is a type of the world—Pharaoh, Satan, Egypt, bondage, Israel itself, and the world.

Just as God is taking His people out of Egyptian bondage, the agenda of God is to take this whole world out of the bondage that it has been in ever since the fall in Eden. Just like Pharaoh does not want to give up territory, neither does the devil. He has enjoyed ruling planet earth illegitimately since the Fall in Eden. We understand he is ruling planet earth—not that God is not sovereign and does not intervene when He wants to, but the course of this world is satanic.

Satan is called the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), the God of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4), the Prince and power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), the one that the believer wrestles with (Ephesians 6:12), a roaring lion that roams about seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8), and the whole world lies within his power (1 John 5:19).

Creation itself is in a state of groaning (Romans 8:22), and even our body is in a state of groaning (Romans 8:23). Yet the agenda of God is to take this whole planet out of satanic bondage, which He will do in the events of the Tribulation period. It is then that these words will be fulfilled:

*"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ"* (Revelation 11:15).

This is why so many plagues in Exodus mirror those in the Book of Revelation. Just like Pharaoh fought the process every step of the way, the devil will also. It is called spiritual warfare. The nice thing about it is that God wins—warfare first, final victory later.

There is one more fast reference at the end of Exodus 9:35 concerning the hardening of Pharaoh: *"...just as the Lord had spoken through Moses"* (Exodus (9:35). Pharaoh's U-turn was something that God predicted would happen. I bring this to your attention because every time God says something, it will take place.

*"From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He"* (John 13:19).

*"Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe" (John 14:29).*

This, of course, becomes the basis for our hope, which is the study of eschatology—the study of the end, the study of the final liberation of planet earth. It will happen. There will be cosmic conflict along the way, but it will happen because God said it would happen.

Pharaoh's hardening was predicted by God. It happened. Satan's recalcitrance against releasing planet earth will happen because God said it would happen. Israel will be free because God said it would happen, and this planet will be free because God said it will happen.

The real question is: Are you on the right side of history? Don't you want to be on the winning team? You can get on the right side of history by placing your personal faith in the finished work of Jesus.

We are going to invite people now within the sound of my voice to do that. That makes you a victor. "I do not feel like a victor, Pastor." You are one. Feelings have nothing to do with it. It is not some power in and of yourself. It is who you are aligned with.