

The Incomparable God

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[0 : 00] I wonder, when was the last time you were doing something and you thought you were in charge or in control, having fun, and then something happened and you very quickly realized you're not in control?

Fear kicked in and you quickly learned to respect something that was happening in front of you. Now, if you've had any dealings with nature, going for hikes in the mountain, swimming in the ocean, surfing, maybe jumping out of planes, you'll know what I'm talking about.

I remember an episode where I was going climbing with a friend and we had been climbing for a number of years, proper climbing with ropes and harnesses. But at some stage you get a little bit, you think you know what you're doing.

There was a rock face, it's in Silvermine, and it's a good, it's about as high as a ceiling. And just the first pitch is difficult, but the rest is fine. And we were sort of guying each other to say, okay, who can make it without the ropes?

We've done it before. And anyway, a friend of mine thought, now he'll try it. And we quickly realized that gravity works just as well up there as it does at the bottom.

[1 : 12] And I'll never forget, he was, just that voice. I just knew he was in trouble. And thankfully I got out of the way just in time. And it was a lesson for both of us.

Well, in the last three plagues that we come across, a set of three plagues, God lets the world know just who is in charge, who is in control, and that should lead people to fear and obey him.

So we've been looking at the plagues, as you know, and they come in sets of three, and we're really looking at the last set of three. Now, we just didn't have time to read them all, but it's the plague of hail, the plague of locusts, and then the plague of darkness before the final curse of the death of the firstborn.

And our story today in Exodus leaves us in no doubt that Yahweh is the incomparable God whose ownership and lordship over every aspect of creation is beyond compare and beyond doubt.

There is no power on earth or in heaven in all of created order that is greater than God. So let's take a look at what makes Yahweh the lord of all the earth.

[2 : 35] We've reached the final cycle of the three plagues, of the final cycle of three. So remember they come in sets of three, and they're busy escalating. In fact, it's time to escalate the whole thing.

The previous plagues have caused discomfort. The last set was a little bit closer to home. But because of Pharaoh's obstinacy in his heart, God is now ready to start dealing out death and destruction.

And so he sends this hailstorm. Now, you need to know this is no ordinary hailstorm. It's not like the hailstorms we get in the Western Cape. You know, when we get hail, we all run outside to see the hail.

We gather it up. We put it in the freezer, and it's very special. It's very cute. Okay? But anyone who's grown up in the high felt knows that hail up there looks very different from hail in the Western Cape.

Hail does serious damage to life and property. I've got some pictures of what happens in severe, but actually quite ordinary hailstorms compared to what we've got in the Bible.

[3 : 36] And, I mean, those cars have been smashed to pieces. The building has been smashed to pieces. And those are severe hailstorms. Now, those hailstorms are cute little Western Cape hailstorms compared to what God rained down on Egypt.

Just have a look at verse 23. Moses stretches out his staff towards the sky. It's incredible. A man with a piece of wood changes weather.

But because his spokesperson is for God, and God has told him what to do, God is behind his actions. The Lord sent thunder and hail and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the Lord rained hail 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. So you've got this picture of not just hail, but rain and wind and flashing fire. Now, yes, there's electricity often with hailstorms. But what this is describing is incredible amounts of fire and fury in between the hail, smashing down into the ground.

[4 : 55] And it's total devastation. God had thankfully, for the first time in the plagues, just before that, said, Okay, Pharaoh, I'm going to give you a chance. I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do. But it's going to be so bad. Get your boys in the field. Fetch your slaves. Fetch your animals. Because they are going to die. Because it's going to be so bad. You know that thing where your parents have said, you know, I've had it up to here? Yeah. It's such a blow that Pharaoh admits to his sin in not listening to God. And that's the first time that Pharaoh has gone that far. He's admitted he's in the wrong. But, of course, it doesn't last long. He changes his mind, or rather he changes his heart. And that's where the real problem lies with Pharaoh. And we'll see later that that is the same problem that lies with us. And so God is forced to send even more severe plagues. And I say we didn't have time to look at them.

[5 : 53] But, I mean, he sends a severe, the locust plague is terrible. So whatever is left over is not going to get eaten by locusts. And, again, we're not talking about Western Cape Karoo plague level. They covered the entire land with darkness. So there's this foreboding thing that's happening. And then to top it off, they reach ESCOM stage 6. Okay, now that doesn't scare us because we're all used to that by now. But the darkness that you can touch. Let's see if I can find it for us quickly. Go over to chapter 10, verse 21. The Lord says to Moses, Stretch out your hand towards the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt. Darkness that can be felt. Now, I don't know about you, but you know when it does get dark? And a few times in the evenings, when we had load shedding and you're going somewhere at night, it's quite airy, isn't it?

[6 : 54] Driving around an area where there's normally light and now there's no light. But can I switch off every source of light? Reach out and touch the darkness. Mm-mm-mm. That doesn't sound like it's going to be fun. That sounds very scary. And also, you don't know when the light is coming back on. In the story, it comes on after three days. You don't know how long it's going to take. It's a little bit like, at least in our load shedding, we knew when it was coming back on. But imagine not knowing. And not knowing what caused it. And then also remembering that your God, Ra, is the sun God, and Pharaoh is the embodiment of him. So what exactly is happening over here? And then you walk over to the land of Goshen where the Israelites are, and they're like certain members of South Africa when there's load shedding. Some have load shedding, others just have a little bit less load shedding than others, and they're dancing in the light. It's an incredibly powerful miracle. But these other plagues are basically making the same point as the point of hail.

[8 : 05] God is showing off just exactly who he is. He's showing us in unmistakable terms that he, Yahweh, is the true and only God of the universe. He's the God over all creation. And not just over all creation, but over all aspects of creation. The weather. The wind. The animals. Light itself. And this is the reason he gives for doing what he's doing. Because he wants people to know who he is, that he's got this kind of power available to him. It's an immense show of power. The whole point you're supposed to get is, wow, who's ever doing that, is really powerful. And if you were there, you would have felt it in your bones. Have a look at verse, go back to chapter 9, verse 13. God is going to show Pharaoh and his people just what kind of power he's got at his command.

[9 : 18] Verse 13, chapter 9. This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews says. Let my people go, so they may worship me, or else, or this time, I will send the full force of my plagues against you.

The Hebrew there is into your heart. You're going to feel it, buddy. And against your officials. Now, it's not just you. I'm going to include everyone and your people.

What for? So that you may know there is no one like me in all the earth. And then he tells them further what he could have been doing to them.

And they must realize how lucky they are. 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.

Is Moses saying those words or is God saying those words? That's God to Moses and then Moses to Pharaoh. Can you imagine what it's like to hear those words from the living God?

[10:30] But I've raised you up, Pharaoh, for this very purpose that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

You know, when there's a massive natural event, we talk about it for many years. Here in South Africa, there was an earthquake 1961 in Toulbac, of all places.

1969. Thanks, Robbie. That was off the top of my head. And as I was saying it, I just knew. And then, so, but we still talk about it.

Like, we still know about it. These plagues, this hailstorm, occurred 1500 BC.

That's three and a half thousand years ago. We're still talking about it. That's how strong it was.

Now, why has God chosen to save in this way? What's the point that he's trying to drive home?

[11:35] Well, firstly, God is showing his human enemy, sorry, God is showing the human enemy of his people just who is boss.

Now, that's not great English. Just who is the boss. I couldn't get the English right there. But he's showing Pharaoh just who the boss is. Pharaoh in his pride has set himself up as the epitome of human wisdom and power, thinking that he's untouchable and that he's able to provide everything that his people needs.

When God is finished with him, his claims to autonomy and self-sufficiency that he can rule, that he's in control, like his crops, are going to lie in tatters.

So, God is showing Pharaoh just who the boss is, but God is also showing his people who the boss is. He needs them to see that he is able to save them completely from every evil force that would get in the way of him fulfilling his covenant promise to them.

They can trust him completely because he can save completely. He's got this magnificent, awesome power at his command. He tends to hide it, although really, if you, every morning you look up, the sun is rising, the stars are out, you're breathing, that's no less the power of God than this hail storm so that every second of every breath, of every heartbeat, of every neuron firing in your brain is because God is keeping you alive.

[13:18] He just has to stop and you're God. nevertheless, his people see this and they go, yes, okay, you're the boss.

They can trust him because he's able to save completely. Now, this is a very different picture from the God that we normally get in the modern world, isn't it?

I don't know about you, I find him a little scary. If you found him a lot scary, that would be even better but because we're Christians, we know that he's also our father but this is the God of the Bible.

He says, this is what I want people to know about me. This is who I am. This is the God that we worship and believe and this is the God that we need to proclaim. As Christians, we must resist the urge to water down, to water this down, this magnificent power of God, to water it down or to minimize it because this is precisely what God wants people to know about him, that he is the owner and the ruler of life on earth and won't tolerate evil hurting his people.

In fact, far from hiding this aspect of God, we should revel in it. You know, the world needs a God who judges like this, who judges evil, especially who judges people who are evil that enslaves and hurts others and who don't care for their well-being.

[14:56] We need a supreme power in command of the chaos around us. Otherwise, it's just chaos. Otherwise, everything just happens by chance with no rhyme or reason.

But that's an intolerable state of affairs where only the strong or the rich or the bullies get their way. Or if there's just pure chance.

Just think of the playground bully or of an abusive partner or of someone fleecing you out of business. Very often in those situations, we can't fend for ourselves.

We need someone stronger and bigger and with more power and authority to come and sort them out and save us from being either beaten up or being hurt or being ruined.

God is the one who does that for his people and it's a good thing. The difference, of course, is that God doesn't show off his might for the sake of hurting others, but he acts in judgment in a judicial sense to protect and to say, yes, people will get hurt when God judges.

[16:11] People die when God judges but we're all under the judgment of death. To some of us, God says, okay, you don't have to die.

I'll save you. People get hurt when God judges but only those who refuse to do the right thing, who refuse to listen and refuse to fear him and fear here is the key that unlocks a response that saves people from his judgment.

So because God is the God of the whole universe and owns everything and got everything under his command, the one thing that we've got to do from this passage is be fearful of him.

To fear him. So the only right response to this kind of power is fear. Now fear is good because it leads to responses that saves lives and property.

Not fearing leads to hard-hearted rebellion and more pain. So have a look at chapter 10 verse 20 when God gave that warning. Whoever feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and livestock into the houses.

[17:31] Do you notice that? So it's whoever feared God. Yes, they listened and they went, oh, he's going to do this. I better go do something, otherwise I'm going to get ruined. But whoever did not pay attention to the word of the Lord left his slaves and his livestock in the field.

What's interesting there is that the Hebrew for who did not pay attention is who didn't take it to heart. Isn't it interesting? So the word of the Lord came to them and it bounced off, left their slaves and the livestock and got taken.

now, it may be strange to hear that we need to fear God. We don't hear that often, do we, anymore? We don't hear often that God is big and scary and needs to be feared.

But fear is a good thing because it alerts us to danger and protects us from harm. I fear getting in an accident when I get in my car so I put my seat belt on. Many people who drive with me have the same fear.

They also put the seat belt on. So having no fear or awareness of danger puts me and others in more danger. Does that make sense? Fear in this context doesn't mean you have to feel scared but rather you take the threat to your life seriously and take the appropriate steps to make sure you stay alive.

[19:00] It just makes sense to do that in that situation. many want to relegate this kind of thinking of God and response to God to the Old Testament but this kind of fear is still valid in the New Testament.

Just notice the response to Jesus' power in the New Testament reading we had in Mark. There's a storm. The disciples fear that they're going to die.

Jesus gets up, tells the storm to be quiet in the same way that a mom would tell their child to hush. It dies down and they freak out.

They are terrified and so would you be if you were sitting in that boat. Because we don't comprehend how that can be. Even if, even if, I bet, even if you prayed, imagine just in the boat, there's a huge storm and you're scared you're going to die and you pray, God, please save me and boom, it goes quiet.

You would be thankful but you would be slightly, there would be something going on there. Now the New Testament is full of this application of fearing Jesus.

[20:19] Very often in the miracles of Jesus, the response is they feared him. They scared of him. They need to reckon with him. This is not an ordinary man.

He can't just take or leave what he says because he can do stuff. So I think our problem in the modern church is we're far too quick to fear not getting what we want and far too slow to not fearing God and his judgments and his abilities.

Instead of fearing him, the modern church is in danger of taking his love and his power for granted because we're so quick to overlook the element of fear in our relationship with God.

And very often you'll hear people say, yes, we don't have to fear God, we just respect him. Now, yes, respect is obviously part of it.

And if by fear you mean be really, really scared of him, I don't think it means that either, although on occasion, well, let me just put it this way, every time someone visits heaven in the Bible, they think they're going to die.

[21 : 30] Or every time God sends one of his minor angels, they think they're going to die. They're actually really scared. And you know what he says? Hey, don't worry, I'm not going to kill you today.

We take this element of fear in our relationship with God for, we're quick to overlook this element of fear in our relationship with him. But Paul, for example, in Romans 11, is writing to warn the Gentiles, that's us, of taking their relationship with God for granted.

And he's comparing what the Jews had in the Old Testament up until Christ came, and comparing it to the Gentiles who have now been brought into God's kingdom.

And he says this to us, do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he's talking about the Jews, he will not spare you either.

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God. Sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness righteousness.

[22 : 50] Otherwise, you also will be cut off. So what all of this should be doing is making us both love God more and fear him more.

We need to take his word, his promise of salvation, and his threat of judgment to heart. God's power is so immense God's God's God's God's right to fear him.

It's natural to have that kind of fear for a being that has that kind of power because he's got the power of life and death. He just does.

Many people don't like that. God's God. They don't like that kind of God. Well, there isn't any other kind of God out there. And this one can actually save you from dying, the very thing that you don't want to have happen to you.

And he can save you from many other evils as well because he's got all these things that his power and his control. God's power is so immense that it's right to fear him. His people are to marvel and fear him for his power.

[24 : 01] It's this mixture of awe and love that will lead us to worship him as the only God and the only real boss in our lives. Otherwise, we'll be in danger of ending up like Pharaoh.

Although he showed signs of repentance, he didn't have a real change of heart. He didn't really fear God. Somehow he thought he could get out of it.

And to live like that is to end up in the most fearful place of all. Judgment, rejection, total and utter ruin.

And this is why Jesus is so important. Because he's the one that God has entrusted with the power to send the Holy Spirit and change people's hearts and minds.

And to change their lives. In John chapter 5, Jesus says this, for just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so, the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

[25 : 18] So all the power of change and salvation resides in one man, Christ. Christ. That's why you've got to deal with him.

That's why you've got to come to him. That's why you want him as your Savior, because he can do it. Moreover, he continues, the Father judges no one, but get this, has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.

Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Now, in the context, he's speaking to the Jews and they're saying, no, we trust God because we've got Abraham, etc.

And he says, no, you guys are missing out now, because God has given that all to me. You've got to deal with me now. And if you deal with me, then only are you dealing with God.

So friends, the only way to have a change of heart is to entrust yourself to the one who has the power to change it. And the only power on earth stronger than your stubborn will is God and the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ.

[26 : 30] Won't you turn to him, ask him for help with your heart and have him change your life and save it. Well, let's pray to God to do that for us now.

Oh, Lord God, we are so small and insignificant. You are so big and powerful. You've shown us who you are, Lord, through your word and through your actions, but above all through Jesus Christ and for his salvation and judgment on the cross.

Lord, you've got the power of life and death. Won't you continue to pour out your spirit and your life-giving power into our lives? Lord, if there's any here who have yet to turn to you in repentance,

Lord, we ask that he would be gracious and call them to you.
And if there are those who, like Pharaoh, repent and yet turn back to sin, Lord, we pray that you be merciful and cause repentance and fear to stick in our hearts so that we can serve you better.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.