

Who is the Lord?

1. Introduction

- Today's talk looks at the question – Who is the Lord?
- When many people think about God and being right with him ... they'll think it's all about being very religious
 - You need to do this, do that
 - You need to obey this and obey that
 - If you do enough ... if you keep the standard ... if you measure up ...
 - Then you get to heaven
- The problem with this understanding of Christianity is
 - Firstly ... it's wrong
 - Secondly ... if that's the way you try and live ...
 - then all your efforts to be good and obey are motivated
 - purely out of fear of not getting into heaven
 - you live your life in fear of failure of being good enough
 - Thirdly ... because of this ... it turns many people off Christianity and they reject the truth about Jesus because they've been sold a false view of what Christianity is about (you may be one of them)
- Today we are continuing our series through Exodus
- Today we get to a very famous section of the book and the whole Bible that chronicles the plagues of Egypt
- As we look at this section of the Bible ... we're going to get a much clearer picture of what Christianity is about and in particular what God is like
- You want to know the heart of Christianity
- You want to see what God is like
 - Then this very famous passage shows us in a very dramatic way
- What we'll see is ...
 - The Lord is One

- The Lord is Judge
- The Lord is Saviour

2. The Lord who is One [SLIDE]

- As we saw last week ... God has raised up Moses to rescue the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt
- Moses had been miraculously adopted by the princess of Egypt, raised in the palace
 - But he was forced to flee Egypt to Midian because the king wanted to kill him
 - While in Midian, God spoke to Moses at the burning bush and called him to go back to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of slavery to freedom
- In Ch 5 we have Moses, with his brother Aaron back in Egypt ready to tell Pharaoh God's message
 - 5:1 *Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'"*
- And Pharaoh replies ...
 - *"Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."*
- Pharaoh's response is full of scorn and sarcasm
 - "You have your god, we have ours ... and I don't know if this god of yours is worth listening to"
- Pharaoh's making clear that
 - he's in charge
 - he's stronger than God
 - he's not going to take orders from anyone
- And so the contest that's been brewing since Ch 1 is now ready to erupt

- And what follows over the next 6 chapters God slaps Pharaoh around and shows him exactly who he is ... as he sends plague after plague after plague on Pharaoh and the Egyptians
- In fact time and again through the plagues ... God tells Moses that he is sending the plagues to answer Pharaoh's question ... "Who is the Lord"?
 - God says ... stand back and let me show you
- Right throughout these chapters God says the plagues are so that both Israel and the Egyptians might **know** who this Lord is
- The first thing God shows them is – The Lord who is (the) One
- That is ... the Lord is the one true God
 - It's not Pharaoh ... it's not the gods of Egypt ... it's the Lord
 - He says in Exodus 9:14 *I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so **you may know** that there is no one like me in all the earth.*
 - There is no-one like God on all the earth
 - He is the one
- This happens as God sends plague after plague on the Egyptians
 - River to Blood
 - Heart of Egyptian life and existence ... God smites it
 - Frogs > everywhere > beds, cupboards, pots, buckets
 - Gnats
 - Now the stakes are too high > the magicians no longer able to match God's power with their dark arts > they know they are defeated
 - Flies, pestilence on livestock, boils, hail, locusts
 - God has supreme control over his creation
 - At his word he brings the plague ... at his word they end
 - Darkness [SLIDE]
 - Supreme god of Egypt was the Sun god (Ra)

- Egyptians worshipped Ra each day
- He was integral part of daily life and he has been blocked from sight for three days
- In doing so God's sending a clear message ...
 - He is greater than Pharaoh and all the gods of Egypt
 - Even Ra ... the sun god is no match for the Lord
 - He put the sun in the sky and can block its power at will
 - He is the Lord who is the One
 - There is no rival to his rule
 - There is none like me in all the earth

3. The Lord who is Judge [SLIDE]

- The second thing the plagues reveal is that God is the **Lord who will judge**
- Right from the start of Exodus ... Pharaoh and the Egyptians have been hostile towards God
- God has made promises to bless the descendents of Abraham
 - Taking them to the promised land
 - Making them into a great nation
 - Blessing them and all nations through them
- And all along, Pharaoh has been seeking to oppose God and undermine him
 - He's enslaved the Israelites in Egypt preventing them from getting to the promised land
 - He's tried to exterminate them preventing God from making them into a great nations
 - He's caused their life to be cursed ... the exact opposite of what God intended
- And despite the devastation, the warning and the humiliation caused by the plagues ... Pharaoh remained hard hearted
 - After Aaron's snake swallowed up the magicians snakes

- When magicians also turned water to blood
- When the Lord took the frogs away
- When God sent the gnats and the flies
- Each time ...
 - *Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.*¹
 - He rejects God and his authority

- And as a result, God judges Pharaoh and the Egyptians
 - *Exodus 7:4-5* ⁴ *he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with **mighty acts of judgment** I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites.* ⁵ *And the Egyptians **will know that I am the LORD** when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it."*

- But notice how he judges them
 - It's through the reversing of the creation order
 - God could have judged Pharaoh and the Egyptians and warned them and any way he liked
 - He could have sent a pillar of fire to smite the magicians and turned to Pharaoh and said
 - "If you don't obey me, you'll be next"
 - But he didn't ... instead he brought disorder and chaos on them

- God wanted his people to be fruitful and multiply
 - Yet Pharaoh had engaged in these anti-life, anti-blessing policies, becoming an agent of disorder and destruction
 - He openly and defiantly set out to overturn God's design for life and order
 - Pharaoh demonstrated he didn't like the way God had ordered and created his world

¹ *Exodus 7:13; 7:22; 8:15; 8:19; 8:32*

- And so God gave him what he wanted - a world not shaped by God's purpose and without his order
- And so the plagues of Exodus 5-10 are the undoing of the created order that we see in Genesis 1 and 2
 - In Gen 1-2 we God bringing order out of the chaos and darkness to make this beautiful and perfect world
 - God put man in charge of it all to take care of it and rule over it
- But here in Ex 5-10 we see the exact opposite of that
- In the plagues, we see all of creation is undone
 - nature out of control
 - nature in disintegration
 - nature in chaos
 - Instead of water bringing life > water brings death
 - Instead of man ruling over the animals ... the animals are out of control and rule over the humans
 - Instead of light being separated from darkness, darkness and disorder reign
- And we're back to where it all began in Gen 1:2 - *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep*
- Then ... by the time the last round of plagues have come upon Egypt, the nation has been utterly is destroyed
 - Hail destroyed all the crops
 - Plague destroyed all their livestock
 - Locusts destroyed what was left of land
- The economy and livelihood of the Egyptians was brought to its knees
- God is making it clear ... if you want to disobey God ... the consequences are disorder and chaos in your life

- To refuse to listen to God is to refuse to listen to the one who made you and the world we live in
- And because he made you and this world ... he knows what's best
 - He's created you and this world with a good order in mind
 - And when you and I
 - refuse to listen ...
 - refuse to obey ...
 - when we harden our heart to God and live life our way ...
 - Then we're undermining God's good order and we reap the consequences of that
 - Disordered life, disintegrated life ... and eventually destruction ... of both now and eternally

- **Illustration - Doctor**
- Suppose you are a over 50 and you go to the doctor and he says
 - You're cholesterol is high ... you need
 - Stop eating this, this and this > mustn't eat these things, stay away from them completely
 - You need to exercise
- Do you turn around and say
 - "Oh he trying to oppress me and ruin my life"
 - "He doesn't care about me, he just wants to stop me enjoying life"
- No! You know he's giving you those directives for your own good ... for your own flourishing ... because he cares for you
 - Because if you don't listen to him ... what's going to happen?
 - You get gall stones, chest pain, angina, numbness in the legs, stroke ... and eventually heart attack and die
 - You'll have disorder, disintegration and eventually destruction

- You see the directives of the doctor are for your flourishing as a human ... they're consistent with who you are as a human

- And if you violate the directives of your doctor ... you are at the very same moment violating yourself!
- To trample on what the doctor says ... you actually trample on your own being

- And if you choose to disobey God like Pharaoh did ... it will only lead to disorder, disintegration and eventually destruction
 - And he doesn't show us how to live so he can oppress you and ruin your life
 - It's not because he doesn't care about you or wants to stop you enjoying life
- No! You he does it for your own good ... for your own flourishing ... because he cares for you
- But unlike the doctor who knows and cares only about our physical needs
- God knows and cares for our
 - Emotional needs
 - Sociological needs
 - Economic needs
 - Sexual needs
 - Relational needs
 - Spiritual needs

- **Application**
- And God shows us how to live in all these aspects of life
 - Not because he wants to lord it over us ... but because he's our maker
 - And as our maker he knows what's best for us
 - Everything he says reflects how we're created and is the best of our human flourishing and freedom

- And the essence of it is ... you mustn't have anything in your life more important than me – anything!

- You can't just come to church occasionally and say I'm believer
- You can't just profess some half-hearted confession like Pharaoh and continue on living life your way
- God says ... "I have to be more important to you
 - than your job
 - than your family
 - than your work
 - than your money"
- "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul strength and mind"
 - "I must be more important to you than anything else"

- And so what happens if you choose not to do that?
- What happens if you choose to harden your heart to God and his authority
- What's going to happen?
 - You're going to experience disorder, disintegration and destruction

- So what if you make your work more important than God?
 - And all you do is work, work, work ... it occupies all your time and thinking
 - What'll happen
 - You'll experience disorder in your family
 - You'll experience disintegration in your health
 - You'll experience emotional disintegration
 - That's not how life is meant to be! Because didn't God create you to live for your work

- What if you make your money more important than God?
 - You become greedy > you want to hoard it
 - That leads to economic and social disorder because you're unwilling to be generous with the good things God has given you
 - Spiritual disintegration because your treasure is where your heart is

- What if you allow your sexual desires to be more important than God
 - Sex before marriage
 - Watching pornography
 - Imposing unrealistic expectations on your spouse of what sex ought to be like
 - Leads to
 - Relational disintegration between husband and wife
 - Emotional disintegration from abortions and sexual abuse and one night stands
 - Social disintegration due to the degrading effects of porn
 - Physical disintegration
 - due to the abuse of women in the porn industry
 - devastating effects of HIV and other STD's

- You see ... when we ignore God and harden our hearts to his good order for this world and our lives we unleash chaos, disorder and eventually destruction

- And so to obey God ... to not harden your heart towards God and his good order for your life
 - Is not only to be spared his judgment and the disorder, chaos and destruction that flows from that
 - But it's the only way to experience life at its best ... as it ought to be ... as he designed it

4. The Lord who is Saviour [SLIDE]

- The final thing God makes known about himself through the plagues is ... he is the Lord who is saviour

- This is really important ... because if we just left it there ... we would all go away and either
 - Be totally ticked off about God's judgment;

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- Or even if you do see the sense in obeying God ... it would only be out of fear
 - It would be like obeying your doctor about eating right because you fear having a heart attack!
 - But it takes more than fear to obey God

 - But to help us move beyond that ... it's also important that we see in these plagues that the Lord is Saviour
 - Not just the Lord who is one
 - Not just the Lord who is judge
 - He is also the Lord who is saviour

 - We see this throughout the plagues in a number of ways
 - First is the way God spares the Israelites from the plagues
 - 8:22 > no swarm of flies invade the region of Goshen
 - 9:4 > God spares the livestock of the Israelites
 - 9:26 > hail storm did not affect God's people
 - So yes, he sends plagues of judgement on those who stand opposed to him
 - But he is also merciful and saves his people

 - Not just the Israelites he saves ... he spares those Egyptians who heed his warning and obey him
 - Plague of hail
 - He warns Pharaoh and the Egyptians ... he doesn't just rub his hands in glee and then smash them with fury from heaven
 - No! He says ... [SLIDE]
 - *Exodus 9:18-20* ¹⁸ *Therefore, at this time tomorrow I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded till now.* ¹⁹ *Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every man and animal that has not been brought in and is*

still out in the field, and they will die." ²⁰ *Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside.*

- They were spared ... because God warned them and showed them mercy
- He urged them to obey him to avoid the coming judgment ... they did and they were saved

- We also see the Lord is saviour in the way he deals with Pharaoh
 - God could have just smited Pharaoh and all of Egypt but the plagues were actually a mechanism for salvation of future generations [SLIDE]
 - *Exodus 9:15* ¹⁵ *For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth.* ¹⁶ *But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.*

- You see through God's actions in Egypt the whole world would know that he is
 - The Lord who is One
 - The Lord who is Judge
 - The Lord who is Saviour

- As people across the world and throughout the generations
 - Millions and millions and millions of people
 - Century after century after century
 - People would hear of this Lord ... hear of his mighty acts ... and so turn to him and be saved
 - He says
 - "I'm doing it so ALL the world will know"
 - "I'm not just doing it to save one ethnic group – the Hebrews"
 - "I'm doing it so that all ppl will know who I am and so come to me and be saved"

[SLIDE]

- And so we see that the plagues are not just about God showing himself as
 - the unique and powerful God of whom there is none like him in all the earth
 - that he judges those who harden their hearts to him and reject his rule
 - Though he is both those things
 - But also that he is saviour
- He not only brings judgement through the plagues, he brings salvation through the plagues

- And you see that's how God operates ... he brings salvation through judgment
- Now that might sound ominous for you and I ... because the idea of judgment is either frightening or repulsive
 - Some people are so freaked out by the idea of facing God's judgment that it causes them to live in fear of God
 - Others are so repulsed by the idea that a loving God could judge anyone, they become like Pharaoh and harden their heart and say "who is the Lord that I should obey him"
- But actually God working is salvation through judgment is actually a wonderful, freeing and comforting reality
- And here's why

- Because many years later, God sent another plague of darkness over the land ...
 - This time it wasn't over the land of Egypt ... but the land of Israel
 - It happened not to bring judgment on Pharaoh ... but on his own son

- You see, when Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross ... Jesus wasn't facing the darkness of judgment he deserved ... but the darkness of judgment that you and I deserved

- That's why Jesus cried out "My God my God why have you forsaken!"
- God's darkness was falling on him!

- On the cross Jesus became the enemy of God
 - He took on the plagues God's judgement > they fell on him
 - He disintegrated ... so that we wouldn't
 - He faced destruction ... so that we won't have to face our own destruction

- As a result we will not receive the plagues and judgement
 - He died it in our place
 - This means Jesus who's the judge of the earth came to **take on** judgment ... not give judgment

- Friends ... this is where Christianity is utterly unique
- Christianity is not like other religions ... because Christianity's understanding of judgment is utterly unique
 - All other religions say "try and be good enough so that you will not be judged"
 - Christianity says - the judge came down and bore judgment for you so that you can be set free

- You see how this makes the Lord so much worth following and obeying
- You see why knowing the Lord who is judge is not a thing to be feared!
- It's a thing to be embraced ... because the Lord who is judge is also the Lord who is your saviour!

- When you understand this truth friends ... can't you see
 - that following Jesus makes sense
 - that following Jesus has got to be the best way to live your life
 - living life under the grace of the Lord who is not only judge but also your saviour

- That's what Christianity is about
 - It's not ... obey and listen or your life will go to dust
 - It's not ... obey and worship me or you will face disintegration
 - No! Because all the plagues all the judgement fell on him

- **Application**
- Now if you think this is true ... if you think what we've seen from Exodus 5-10 about the Lord is right ... then we have the right incentive for obeying the Lord
- There are hundreds of implications that flow from this
- Let me just pick a couple of quick examples

- First ... if the Lord is judge ... then that means it is easier for us to forgive people
 - You know why?
 - Because when people wrong you ...
 - You don't have to seek retribution or retaliate or hold a grudge in order to pay them back for hurting us
 - Because you know the Lord is judge
 - He will sort it out ... you don't have to
 - So it frees you to be more tolerant ... to be able to forgive more ... to be let go of hurts from the past

- Secondly ... when you're gripped by God's grace to us in Jesus
 - When you feel the weight of him taking to plagues of judgment so that you won't face disintegration and destruction
 - Then that's humbling
 - It means I have nothing to boast in
 - It helps me see my sin, my flaws, my failings, my shortcomings ... all those things that Jesus died for
 - And that helps me

- to let go of pride
 - to be less defensive when I am wrong ... because I know it's true
 - to be less judgmental of others because I know I am just as flawed as others
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- Pharaoh said – who the Lord that I should obey?
 - The Lord who is One
 - there is none like him in all the earth
 - The Lord who is Judge
 - Reject him and you'll bring disorder, disintegration and destruction on your life
 - The Lord who is Saviour
 - he is the one who takes on the plagues of judgment and the darkness from God we deserve ... in order to set us free
 - He is the Lord ... and he is worthy to be obeyed

PRAY