

REMNANT CHURCH SERMON NOTES – ROMANS 9: 17-18
PREACHED ON SEPTEMBER 27, 2026, BY REV. B.B. ANUM-HIGHER

17 For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

➤ **INTRODUCTION**

- In Paul's answer to the question of whether God is just in choosing some people for salvation while passing over others, he quotes from the Old Testament concerning Pharaoh. In verse 17, Paul writes, "For Scripture says to Pharaoh." But what does it mean for Scripture to speak to someone? We have the Scriptures open before us this morning, so what does it mean when Scripture speaks to us? Paul is quoting from Exodus chapter 9, so let us turn there and see who is actually speaking.
- Look at the opening verse: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh and say to him, "This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may worship me.'" Who is speaking? It is the Lord God himself. In fact, throughout the first twenty-six verses of this chapter, the only recorded speaker is the Lord. Moses is silent, and Pharaoh is silent. Then, in verse 16, God speaks the words that Paul quotes in Romans 9: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."
- But notice how Paul introduces these words when writing to the Romans. He does not say, "God says to Pharaoh." Instead, he says, "Scripture says to Pharaoh." What does that tell us? It tells us that when Scripture speaks, God speaks. If those words have been written in Scripture, then they carry the authority of God's own voice. The words of the Old Testament are the words of God, and therefore our consciences are bound to believe and obey them as though God Himself were speaking directly to us. It is the same with the New Testament. To reject the teaching of Scripture is ultimately to reject the authority of the God who gave it.
- Because this chapter is the Word of God, refusing what it teaches is not merely an intellectual disagreement; it is a sin against God. We have every reason to believe Scripture, and the greatest reason is this: what Scripture says is what God says. Therefore, it is true—absolute and trustworthy truth. There are at least three other places in the New Testament where we see the apostles and the early church treating Scripture in exactly the same way Paul does here.
- **First**, consider Galatians 3:8. Paul writes, "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'" Paul is quoting from Genesis 22:18. But

when you turn to Genesis, you discover that it is God Himself who is speaking those words. Yet Paul says to the Galatians that Scripture preached the gospel to Abraham—the good news that God's blessing would one day extend to the nations. So we cannot separate what Scripture declares from what God declares. What Scripture says, God says; and what God says, Scripture says. Scripture itself was announcing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith. The written Word was preaching God's promise to Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

- **Second**, turn to Acts 4:25, where the apostles are praying. They say to God, “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?’” This quote comes from Psalm 2, which is attributed to David. Humanly speaking, David wrote the psalm. Yet the apostles say that the Holy Spirit spoke those words through David. Do you see what they are saying? David was the human instrument, but the Holy Spirit was the divine author. David spoke, but God spoke through David. The human author and the divine Author are both involved, yet there is no conflict between them. The words written by David were simultaneously the words spoken by the Holy Spirit.
- **Finally**, consider the apostle Paul in Acts 28, when he arrives in Rome. In verses 25 and 26, he says, “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when He said through Isaiah the prophet: ‘Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”’” Paul quoted words written by the prophet Isaiah more than 700 years earlier, from Isaiah 6. Isaiah wrote them, yet Paul identifies the ultimate speaker as the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God spoke through Isaiah.
- So notice the remarkable consistency of the New Testament’s understanding of Scripture. In Romans 9, Paul says, “Scripture says to Pharaoh.” But when we go back to Exodus 9, we discover that it was Jehovah God who was speaking. In Galatians, Scripture is said to have preached the gospel. In Acts, the Holy Spirit is said to have spoken through David and Isaiah. Therefore, when Scripture speaks, God speaks. The Bible is not merely a record of what men once thought about God. It is the authoritative Word of God Himself. So, with that foundation established, let us now carefully examine the words God spoke to Pharaoh.

➤ **GOD DEMANDED REPENTANCE AND SUBMISSION FROM PHARAOH.**

- There are seven entire chapters of Scripture devoted to describing the long confrontation between Moses, the man representing God, and Pharaoh, the most powerful ruler in the world. It is showdown time in Egypt. The Israelites have lived in the land of Goshen for four hundred years, and during much of that time, they have been reduced to a slave class under Egyptian oppression. But now God has determined that their slavery will end. He has promised them a land of their own, and the time has come for Him to bring them out of Egypt in a great

multitude and lead them toward Canaan. God announces this to Moses in the wilderness through the burning bush. Moses is now eighty years old. He probably thinks that his life is largely behind him and that his greatest opportunities have already passed. For forty years, he has been living in the wilderness, working as a shepherd for his father-in-law. But then God intervenes, and Moses discovers that his life and ministry are only beginning.

- Moses, the worshipper of the true God, goes before Pharaoh, who worships the Nile, the sun, the moon, the animals, the crops, and even his own firstborn son. Moses comes in the name of Jehovah and delivers God's command to Pharaoh: "Let my people go, so that they may worship me." Pharaoh refuses. But God begins to demonstrate His supernatural power before him. Through Aaron, Moses throws down his staff, and it becomes a serpent. The confrontation has begun. It becomes a ten-round contest, and in every single round, Pharaoh loses. The first round is the plague of blood. The River Nile turns to blood. The fish die, and the water becomes undrinkable. So much for the mighty god of the Nile! The Lord humiliates the very thing in which Egypt placed its confidence. First round goes to Moses and Jehovah. Yet Pharaoh hardens his heart and refuses to let God's people go.
- And so the contest continues. The next round brings frogs, then gnats, then flies. After that comes the death of the Egyptian livestock, the outbreak of painful boils, the devastating plague of hail, the invasion of locusts, and then the plague of darkness. So much for the sun god of Egypt! The darkness falls over the land, but God's people have light. And finally comes the tenth and most devastating plague: the death of the firstborn, including the firstborn son of Pharaoh.
- Ten plagues. Ten humiliations of Pharaoh. Ten demonstrations of Jehovah's superiority. Ten victories for God and His servant Moses. But why did God allow the confrontation to continue through ten plagues? Why did He take Pharaoh through such a prolonged process of humiliation? Why did He not simply crush Pharaoh at the beginning? Our text gives us the answer in Romans 9:17: "For Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'"
- Here is one of the great historical examples of the confrontation between the powerful rulers of this world and the sovereign God who rules over them. Pharaoh was, for his generation, comparable to the most powerful political leaders of our own day. Throughout history, powerful men have risen to positions where they seemed almost invincible. For a few years, they appeared to control nations, armies, economies, and the course of history. But eventually they disappear. "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."
- Pharaoh was powerful, but God was confronting him. The time had come for God's people to leave Egypt. God was saying, in effect, "It is time for my people to go. Goodbye, Pharaoh. We are leaving, and your mighty army will not be able

to stop us!” But the proud and foolish Pharaoh resisted God's command. He refused to submit. Then we see, through Pharaoh's hardness of heart and through God's sovereign dealings with that hardened heart, ten devastating encounters with the gods and idols of Egypt. In every plague, God was displaying His superior power and making His name known—not merely in Egypt, but throughout the earth.

- In Moses' day, Pharaoh was one of the most famous and feared men in the known world. He can be compared to President Donald Trump of today. Everyone had heard of Pharaoh, while comparatively few had heard of Jehovah. Yet look at what God has done. Today, the identity of that particular Pharaoh is debated, and his power is long gone. His armies have disappeared. His kingdom has passed away. His glory has faded. But the name of the Lord is known throughout the earth. Jesus Christ is worshipped by people in every nation, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are proclaimed throughout the world. God accomplished exactly what He said He would accomplish: He displayed His power and made His name known throughout all the earth.

➤ **GOD DISPLAYED HIS GLORY THROUGH PHARAOH'S REBELLION.**

- Pharaoh was filled with anger and rebellion, but Jehovah is able to make even the wrath of men serve His purposes and bring praise to His name. Without becoming the author of evil, God can take hold of wicked rulers and wicked men and use even their rebellion to display His glory. That is precisely what God was doing with Pharaoh. He was humbling this proud rebel while making His name known among the nations. God gave Pharaoh repeated opportunities to repent—ten great opportunities in the course of those plagues. How many opportunities do you give your staff, your spouse, your children, or your fellow church members to repent and turn from their sins?
- At first, these two things may appear contradictory: God was humbling a proud dictator, while at the same time giving that same man opportunities to repent. But there is no contradiction. Both truths stand together. Again and again in Exodus, we are told that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but again and again we are also told that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Here we see both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Both are true. We may not know precisely how they fit together or where they meet, but God knows. Our inability to fully reconcile these truths does not give us permission to deny either of them.
- This is exactly in keeping with what Paul teaches at the beginning of Romans. He writes that “God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.” They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator. Then Paul says, “Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.” And again, “Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge

of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done” (Romans 1:24–26, 28).

- Notice that there are two forces at work simultaneously. First, the sovereign God is at work: “He gave them over.” Second, the people themselves are at work. The sinful desires belong to them and arise from their own hearts. They degrade their own bodies. They deliberately refuse to retain the knowledge of God. They do these things willingly, and then God gives them over to the consequences of their rebellion. God is at work, and they are at work. We must hold both truths together.
- When God gives people over, can we really accuse Him of injustice? When God hardens a person's heart, He is not forcing an innocent person to become evil. He is giving that person over to the sinful direction he has already chosen. God judicially confirms the rebellion that is already present in the human heart. He allows people to pursue the desires they have stubbornly embraced. No one will stand before God in judgment and truthfully say, “I wanted Christ, but God would not let me have Him.” The sinner does not want Christ. Even in hell, the lost will hate their punishment, but they will not suddenly become lovers of Jesus Christ. Their problem has always been their rebellion against God.
- That is what we see in Pharaoh. He was not destroyed by a single isolated decision. His destruction was the result of a settled, proud, anti-God disposition that repeatedly encountered the power of God, heard the command of God, witnessed God's judgments, and yet continued to say, “No!” Again and again, God confronted Pharaoh with the truth. Again and again, Pharaoh refused to bow. Again and again, his heart hardened. Pharaoh's condemnation, therefore, displayed both God's sovereign purpose and Pharaoh's own sinful responsibility. God was accomplishing His purposes, while Pharaoh was willingly persisting in his rebellion.
- Let me illustrate this with a man who has become addicted to pornography. He makes a deliberate choice to go to a pornographic website. He is tempted, but he still decides to click the button and look. Then he does it again, and again, and again. Every time he presses that button, he is making another choice. Over time, those repeated choices shape the man he becomes. What does the unclean and lustful man eventually become? He becomes increasingly enslaved to his own impurity. As the tree falls, so it lies.
- That is something like what hell is. People do not simply fall through a trapdoor into hell without warning. Their destination is revealed in the direction of their lives and the choices they continually make. Some of you may be walking toward hell right now because of the decisions you are repeatedly making. You are resisting the Word of God. You are silencing your conscience. You are repeatedly saying no to God's commands. You are hardening your heart just as Pharaoh did, and the choices you are making are carrying you farther and farther away from God.

- Pharaoh did not end in destruction merely because God had sovereignly determined His purpose. Pharaoh himself repeatedly chose rebellion. God was patient with him. God confronted him again and again. God gave him repeated opportunities to humble himself, repent, and release God's people. Yet again and again, we read that Pharaoh hardened his heart. His destruction, therefore, reveals both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. God accomplished His purpose, but Pharaoh was responsible for his own sinful choices.

➤ **CONCLUSION**

- Paul has shown us this morning that all 66 books of the Bible are the very words of God. God spoke through the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New Testament so that we could have His words in written form. People pay huge sums of money to hear great men in our societies speak to them. National television will bring in experts to discuss politicians' speeches and the words of other great people. Here, Paul tells us that the Bible we have before us is the very words of God, who is the Creator, Sustainer, and Judge of the world.
- The writings of the prophets in the Old Testament, the epistles of the apostles in the New Testament, and all other books in the Bible are God-breathed because the Holy Spirit superintended every aspect of their writing and compilation. Every word and every statement in the original Scripture was the very truth of God, clear, trustworthy, and entirely without error. What is our approach to the Bible, the very words of God? My brothers and sisters, there is no better place for us to be than gathered around God's Word, and no better book for us to study than the inspired Scriptures.
- What do we learn from Pharaoh, the man who hardened his heart against God? Are you hardening your heart against God? Be warned: that path leads to self-destruction. Perhaps some of you are already walking down that road. And if it were not for the grace of God, I would be walking down that same road, and so would many of us, because by nature we are no different from anyone else. We are all sinners, and we all come from the same fallen humanity.
- If anyone is finally lost, the blame belongs to that person; but if anyone is saved, all the glory belongs to God. Deliverance is by grace, not by race; by faith, not by physical descent; by mercy, not by merit. If you are confident enough to demand that God treat you according to strict justice and fairness, then none of us would be saved, because, as Paul declares, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).
- There is no one who naturally does what is right—not one. Jew and Gentile alike stand guilty before God. We are all in the same boat. We cannot rescue ourselves. If we are to be saved, it must be because God, in His sovereign mercy and grace, reaches down and saves us. By the grace of God, we have what it takes to be saved in the Bible. You are to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus

Christ, and in Him you will find forgiveness of sins, peace with God, the truth about who you are, the purpose for which you were created, and the certain hope of everlasting life. AMEN.