

The story of Exodus began with a name. Do you remember it? Moses wanted to know it. God's name, I AM. God's name is synonymous with two things: presence and power.

- I AM present, always.
- I AM powerful. *I have power to make you a people, to give you a history, to free you from bondage*

But whether God is present and powerful puzzles most people.

In the story, God works in power through Moses and Aaron. But not everyone sees it that easily.

Pharaoh, for instance. He's a very powerful person. Moses to him was a nobody. Kings impressed Pharaoh, not shepherds. But Pharaoh did not know his Bible well. The Bible says not to put your trust in princes. Their power is fleeting. The Psalmist says, "When their breath departs, on that very day their plans perish" (Ps 146:4).

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust" ...says the Book of Common Prayer. William Shakespeare writes, "Remember Caesar, thou art mortal."

Do you believe it's true? Do you believe as the Bible states that powerful people's power is strictly an illusion, that it's fleeting?

Think about Shinichi Sasaki, head of Quality Control at Toyota. I wonder how job security is for him right now, with the recall of eight million cars.

There's George Papandreou, Prime Minister of Greece. His authority is being undermined as the EU rescues his country from the huge financial crisis it's facing.

Then there's Tiger Woods. We'll never see him the same again, and the same for John Edwards, though he was once a likeable, viable candidate for the presidency.

Powerful people's power is fleeting. Don't put your trust in them.

What about Steve Jobs? When I saw the picture on the cover of *The Economist*, it seems he might beware. He was dressed in vestments, with a halo over his head, holding up an Ipad, which some people irreverently call a "Jesus tablet."

### **Don't put your trust in princes.**

But Pharaoh didn't believe that. He believed he was a god himself, head of the gods, and he operated from that sense of power.

As we learned last week, gods dominated life in Egypt, particularly gods related to the Nile. Heket, the frog goddess, was known as the goddess of childbirth and fertility. Each year thousands of frogs appeared along the Nile at certain times, symbolizing fruitfulness and life. One myth tells how pharaohs were born with the help of the frog goddess.

But God had other ideas about the productivity and fruitfulness of gods and goddesses, and with this next plague, God overshadowed the goddess of fertility. Hopefully you see the humor and creativity of God as God met the enemy head on.

Plagues were not that unusual in Egypt. They were believed to be divine acts. In fact, people in the ANE (Ancient Near East) would say “hand of god X” as an idiom for plague. This frog infestation would have been called “the hand of goddess Heket.” Plagues were sent from the “hand of god.” So God’s decision to strike Egypt through plagues was God’s way of taking on those gods. This was an epic struggle between God and pharaoh to show who, in fact, has real power.

God mostly meets people on their playing field, as we discussed before. Whenever you read the expression in the Bible “the strong arm of God brought the Israelites out of Egypt” think of that common, everyday idiom.

As the Apostle Paul says, “We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

And, as we learned in our earlier reading of 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, Satan is powerful and works against God, not as God’s equal by any means, but as God’s opponent. (The Scripture is here for your convenience:)

*(The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned.)*

As the man of power, the pharaoh was responsible for the fertility of the land. But God challenged that fertility. God made a direct assault on the king. God defied the king’s ability to maintain ecology. The king’s power was challenged. And as that challenge occurred, Pharaoh found he could not protect Egypt from Moses and Aaron, regardless of their low status. He could not protect the environment. Let’s read it. READ Exodus 8:1-15

What do you do when you are threatened? Whether it’s a teen taking a test in school or you and me when our control is seriously challenged – we pray! I think that’s ultimately how we know there is a God; something within us drives us to pray or ask for prayer. And Pharaoh seeks prayer.

This most powerful man, the man who is a “god” who is in charge of the gods; who is responsible for the ecology of the Nile so that Egypt remains stable and safe, seeks the help of the Hebrew’s God.

What do you do when you are in trouble? Do you pray? Do you see God as a hugely powerful resource? If not, perhaps you do not have a clear, Scripture-based picture of God.

Not only is God powerful, God hears every prayer, no matter what. God can't help Himself.

So in desperation, Pharaoh prays. And in asking for prayer, Pharaoh acknowledges the Lord. It's not an acknowledgement of faith but it's a step in the right direction.

Do you struggle with having faith? Pray.

By praying you do several things.

- You acknowledge God.
- You call on Someone bigger than you.
- You enter into community with God.
- You make claims on God based on your relationship.

You essentially say like the prophet Jeremiah, "Yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name; do not forsake us! (14:9)

See, Pharaoh simply relied on his magicians in the past. But they could not fix the problem; they could only duplicate Moses and make it worse. That was the catalyst which drove Pharaoh to try another God, the Hebrew God.

But God had an overall goal concerning Pharaoh. Did you catch it? Moses said, "When do you want me to pray?" Pharaoh answered, "Tomorrow." Moses replied, "It will be as you have said. *Then you will know that there is no one like the LORD our God.*" **There's the goal.**

When you pray, God has goals for you. So bear that in mind. Prayer is not simply a magic method of getting what you want. You will never harness the power of God, for God is in charge. Pharaoh wanted relief from his problem. Nothing wrong with that. But, when you invite God in prayer to help you, expect God to also make claims on you and to work for a deeper purpose, not just solve your problem.

Expect answers, but they may not be exactly the way you would do things, because God has a higher agenda for your life. God wants you to know God as Lord.

So here's how God answered Pharaoh's prayer.

The dead frogs died. Right where they were. In their pots and pans, their beds, on the floor, in the street, they were everywhere. It was very distressing but it was an answer!

I can feel Pharaoh's pain. Once when we lived in Red Oak we had a fire ant problem. They got in our closet and our clothes, or linens, and one night in our bed. We discovered it when we were awakened by ants on our pillows biting us. It was alarming! We prayed. I would have been happy to see ant carcasses everywhere, and for days I checked the bed carefully. I checked each piece of clothing before putting it on, not trusting that they were truly gone.

There is nothing wrong with crying out to God for simple relief and we are invited to ask of God, and reassured that we will receive an answer. But we must realize God's claim on us. Pharaoh would have to come to grips with that, but right now, he refuses. That desire for his own power was great. He couldn't see that God would be in charge so he hardens his heart. He became deluded.

We have to realize God has plans for us long before we pray. God will not be controlled by your prayer, but seeks to help you understand He will walk beside you as God is, a God of marvelous, miraculous power. "I will be there as who I AM," God says. And I will help you if you seek me with your whole heart with my righteous right hand. AMEN