

The Pharaoh Option

Exodus

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Bible Text: Exodus 8:25-28; Exodus 10:8-27
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Exodus 8. What I'm going to do is I'm going to read verses 25 through 28 and then I'm going to ask you to turn over to chapter 10 of the book of Exodus, but we're going to start first in Exodus 8, beginning reading at verse 25 through the end of 28.

25 Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." 26 But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? 27 We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us." 28 So Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me."

Now chapter 10, if we move over to chapter 10, I'm going to read first verses 8 through 11.

8 So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. And he said to them, "Go, serve the LORD your God. But which ones are to go?" 9 Moses said, "We will go with our young and our old. We will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the LORD." 10 But he said to them, "The LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. 11 No! Go, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you are asking." And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

Now if you'll same chapter, verse 24 through 27.

24 Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, "Go, serve the LORD; your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind." 25 But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. 26 Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must

take of them to serve the LORD our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the LORD until we arrive there." 27 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.

This is God's word.

This is a picture of Mount Washington United Methodist Church as they worship today. May we pray for them as we pray for ourselves.

Heavenly Father, grateful for the church, for the people of God here in this community, praying for them today that as they worship, as they spend time loving you and reorienting their hearts to you, may they be drawn to a sincere, pure devotion unto Jesus Christ. May we say no to all other options that we might be loyal and undivided in our love for our Savior. In his name we pray. Amen.

Well, we have been in the book of Exodus and here's where we're at: God has made it clear to Pharaoh that he must let God's people go and up until now, we saw this together, he's refused. Pharaoh has said, "No way," and so God has responded with what we know as the 10 plagues or the 10 strikes, the 10 blows, and they are designed to persuade Pharaoh to change his mind that he might let the people of God go and so that Pharaoh and the Egyptians will know that the Lord, he is God. In other words, all these other gods are nothing but fakes and phonies and that the God of Israel is the one true God. And yet I want you to think about this with me for just a moment: in spite of these plagues, in spite of the severity of these plagues, they start and they get worse as they go, in spite of the plagues, Pharaoh has remained hardened against God's commands.

Now I want you to think about that with me for a moment because, again, what are these plagues? God said, "I'm going to multiply my signs and wonders." God is saying, "I'm going to do extraordinary things that you haven't seen before, designed that you might know that I'm the Lord." Yet in spite of these signs and wonders, people remain hardened against God. You see, we often think in 2018 that if God would just come out in a clear plain way, he'd do just a mighty miracle, if he'd just do extraordinary things, that these hard-hearted unbelievers maybe family members, friends, coworkers, they'd finally come around. I certainly hope so but we find here that in spite of these incredible extraordinary signs and wonders, people remained hardened to the Lord.

However, Pharaoh does begin to change a little bit. If you read through the plagues, there's one of the plagues, the plague of flies, these irritating flies. I mean, one fly can drive you up the wall, right? But imagine a massive plague of flies. Well, it got to Pharaoh. He was ready to negotiate and what we just read just a moment ago, we read what you might call a series of options from Pharaoh. If I was going to title this today, I would say "Resisting Pharaoh's Options," because he's ready to make a deal and you'll notice that each option that he gave conceded a little bit more, however, all the while he refused to obey God's full command. God's full command, "Let the people go; let them come out into the wilderness and worship me." And Pharaoh gave some options, "Well, go serve the Lord but do it this way." Or, "Go serve the Lord but do it this way." What I

want you to notice, first, is Pharaoh is giving options in the place of full obedience to God. That's our focus today, Pharaoh's options. Options, alternatives to, what? To the one thing, full obedience to God.

Now we should be familiar with this. We should be. If you've read your Bible at all, you've been in church for a while, you probably know what I'm about to say. We should be familiar with the origin of this idea of options in the place of full obedience to God. All we have to do is go back to Genesis 3 where we find Satan through a very subtle deception succeeds in leading Eve astray from full obedience to God to another option. Remember, "Surely, Eve, surely God didn't say that. I mean, surely you can go ahead and eat of the tree and when you do, your eyes are gonna be opened and you're gonna be just like God." He gave a number of options. You see, this is Satan's goal. We learn from Genesis 3 that Satan's goal will be to present options as alternatives to full obedience to God.

I was reading the other day, I was quite encouraged by this in a way, so a lot of Americans believe there is a devil. Now what they think about him, what they understand about him, it's a little muddy but many people believe there's a devil and I certainly do. I certainly do and I want to call your attention just for a few minutes to remind you about his strategy, his method of operation. Let's think this way. First, let's think about unbelievers. Many of you, you know people that you've talked to, you've witnessed to, you've prayed for, yet they remain an unbeliever. I want you to see something in 2 Corinthians 4 that Satan does to unbelievers. Notice, "the god of this world," that would be Satan, has notice, "blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of Christ." Now think about that with me just for a moment. What does Satan blind? Our minds, okay? Now that's interesting in and of itself. You see, our mind is a receptor of words, thoughts and ideas. So first we know that Satan's working in the area of our mind to blind our minds.

Now, secondly, blind our minds from what? Well, first let's say what it's not. Satan is not working to blind our minds to religion. Oh no. You know, people willing to come to church on Sunday but not willing to leave their sins behind the rest of the week. Or some are interested in becoming very religious without ever becoming a Christian, without ever submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They are willing to look and become very religious. Satan is not trying to blind people's mind to religion, oh no, he's fine with that, by drinking all the religion you want. No, what he wants to blind our minds to is what? "To keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."

Now what's that all about? Well, you see, he doesn't blind our minds from religion. You see, religion is this idea that, "I can do it. If I do this, he'll accept me. If I do this, I'll be okay." He doesn't want us to see the good news that Jesus comes not primarily as a teacher of morality but, first and foremost, as a Savior. We were just saying a moment ago, "What a Savior! What a Savior!" Not what a great moral teacher. He was, he was that, but that's not first and foremost. First and foremost he comes to save us. He comes to bring the good news that beneath the change of behavior is the need of a change of heart. It's the need for a new heart, a new birth. Religion does not provide those things,

only the Gospel does. You see, think about it. You have an enemy, there's an enemy who deliberately seeks to blind the minds of men and women, boys and girls, from ever seeing this beautiful glorious Savior, this wonderful, great, grand, good news.

He labors endlessly, effortlessly, often to blind the minds of unbelievers, but what happens when a person does become a believer? What happens when this marvelous miracle takes place, that our eyes are opened and this penetrating light of the Gospel shines into our darkness? What happens when we do become believers? Well, Satan's strategy changes. You'll see it in 2 Corinthians 11:3, probably my favorite verse in all the Bible because it is very clear on its warning, "But I am afraid," Paul said, "that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts," church, your, church, your thoughts, "will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." So if you're a believer, here's what's going on: if you have had this miracle that you love Jesus and you want to follow Jesus and he is yours and you trust him for what he's done and who he is, then you can be sure that the devil's strategy now is to lead you astray so that you will drift away, what? You will drift away from the very heart of Christianity, the very essence of Christianity.

You see, some people wonder sometimes if you were asked this week, "Tell me, tell me what is Christianity? Could you tell me what it is?" Here's your answer: the essence, the heart of Christianity is that Christ saves men and women that they might have a sincere and pure devotion to him. Here's what it might look like. You see, sincere, the word sincere means exclusive. It means undivided loyalty to Christ. Think about a person who's engaged, they have an engagement ring, the date has been set, and the spouse has to go away to a foreign country, they're away for a long time, what does each one do? Well, we hope that each one remains loyal to their groom or bridegroom, right? And it's interesting that that's the way the Bible puts it. One of the images that is used for you and I to be in Christ is that we are betrothed to him. We've been promised to him. He has won us. He has bought us. We are his. Jesus is mine. We belong to him and we are to live out our lives as we wait for his return as the bride and the bridegroom are reunited.

We are to wait and remain loyal, faithful, undivided in our devotion to him, and you see, that is why that Satan works so hard deceptively to lead us away from a sincere pure devotion to Christ and Satan does it by giving us options. Notice Pharaoh here is a perfect example, I think. Pharaoh says to Moses and Aaron, he says, "Go, serve your Lord." Now first start off with that, he's not against serving the Lord, he says, "Go serve the Lord. Go. Go. Just do it here, do it here in Egypt. No need to go to the wilderness. No need to go, do it here." Then when Moses said, "Nah, that's not gonna work." "Well, go into the wilderness then," but notice he said, "not very far." Option 3, Moses said, "No, don't think so." Option 3, "Well, go and serve your Lord but just the men go. Leave the women and children behind. No family worship. No, just men. Just let the men go. I'll let the men go, that's fine. Go serve the Lord." Moses said, "Nah, that's not gonna work." Then finally, "Alright, go, men, women, children, go, but leave your flocks behind, leave all your herds behind." And why is that significant? Well, no animals to sacrifice. Moses said, "No, that's not gonna work. We're gonna take our animals with us because we're gonna take sacrifices to offer unto the Lord our God."

What are we seeing here? Now stay with me. What are we seeing here? Throughout history, God's people have been confronted with options in the place of a sincere pure devotion to Christ. All throughout history God's people have had to face options. You will be offered options as opposed to sincere pure devotion to Christ. Let me give you a few examples, if I may. The first one, there is the option of halfway. Back in 1662, it is, listen, it is so helpful to know church history. It's so helpful. In 1662, the Halfway Covenant was introduced by a group of Congregationalist ministers. Now I want you to think through with this. We've got some preachers who sit down and go, "We've got a problem. We've got a problem. We need to work on this." And they hammered out an answer and the answer would be the Halfway Covenant. Now why did they have to do that? Well, in the years prior to 1662, a reasonable requirement for church membership was conversion. Now that makes sense, right? Now think about it, a person says, "I want to join this church." Have you been converted? Are you trusting Jesus as your Savior? What if they say, "Nah, none of that, I just kinda like hanging out with you guys, you know? I like the social life. I like the stuff you all do." No, the requirement for church membership was, "Have you been converted? Are you trusting Christ?"

Well, here's what happened. That's what had been the requirement, a person would give witness to their personal faith in Jesus Christ before being admitted to church membership, but what if a person had no conversion yet they wanted to join the church? Now I hope our answer in 2018, at Calvary I hope the answer would be, well, they're not gonna join. They're not gonna have the opportunity to join unless they have been converted and give witness to their personal faith in Jesus Christ. But in 1662, it had come to a head. There were people who wanted to join the church so that they could have benefits of the church such as their children could be baptized. You see, they believed that, "We gotta get these kids baptized. We've gotta do it, gotta get them in the water and that'll take care of things." And you know, for some it's kind of like we get them in the water, we never have to see church again. But anyway, they wanted their children to be baptized and so in order for that to happen, they had to be members, and so the Halfway Covenant was developed.

Now here's what it was. The Halfway Covenant was a compromise to allow certain people to retain a limited measure of membership privileges without meeting the full measure of personal qualifications. What does all that mean? It means that it's kind of like a gym membership, you know, and so you don't get the premium, the premium would mean you're converted, okay, but you get the less, you can use these things over here, you can use the, you know, these things over here but you can't have this. You've got to have full membership. You're in halfway without a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. You could say it this way: they were halfway in. And someone might say, "Isn't halfway in good? I mean, before they were not in at all but they're halfway in. Isn't that good?"

I don't know. You help me think about it. You board a plane in Los Angeles. You're headed to Hawaii and the pilot decides, "Look, I've got to be at my boy's baseball game so we're only going halfway." And so they dump you in the Pacific. I know you say, "That's silly, Brother Van." Well, let's get one less silly then. You have, you need

quadruple bypass, okay? The doctor says you've got to have quadruple or you're not going to make it. So you're getting quadruple bypass surgery and yet he remembers he's got to be at his little girl's soccer game, that's priority, "I gotta be there! And so only going to do half of it. We're only going to do a double." You okay with that? You okay with halfway? No, I don't think so. How about the school bus driver? They pick up your five year old and they remember that they've got some other priority other than bringing the children to school so they dump them halfway between your house and school. Is that okay? No, it's probably not okay. Or how about that little lady or that young man you're betrothed to and you've been away for a while and you come back and you say, "Honey, have you been faithful to me?" "Well, I was halfway faithful to you." I think we all and when we think about it, halfway is no way at all. You see, halfway is missing the heart of Christianity, the heart of Christianity is an exclusive undivided loyalty to Jesus, not halfway.

Now don't misunderstand, don't anybody hear me saying that you're going to be perfect. I'm not talking about moral perfection here, I'm talking about a trajectory of heart, a trajectory of heart. We may fall, we may stumble on the way but we get up and we confess our sins, we turn from our sins and we keep on the trajectory of a sincere undivided loyalty to Jesus. That's the heart of Christianity. Don't go halfway.

But secondly, there's the option of a third way. What's that? Now, some of you know, some of you don't know, option of a third way. If you were to go home, and don't do it right now but if you were to go home later, get your phone out, laptop, whatever, look up, you can look, I'm not making this stuff up, you can look up third way theology, third way churches. There are third way churches who are practicing what is called third way theology. This is not new, by the way. You could at least go back 150-160 years and find this effort to find a third way.

Now what does that mean? Well, let's first think about a secular context. You've got some who are Republican, some who are Democrat, and some who are conservative, some who are liberal, some who are extreme on this end, extreme on this end, and there's always been that middle ground called moderate, you see? So a person says, "I want to be moderate." What they're saying is, "I want to find a middle ground between this craziness and this craziness," you see. Between the extremes, "I want to try to find a middle way." That's the secular context for a third way, but in the church there are those who have been looking for and believe they have found a third way, middle ground. Fundamentally here's what they believe, that theological and doctrinal positions take a secondary place to love and acceptance. In other words, all these things like believing in the miracles in the Bible, you know, "You're not gonna ask me to believe that God opened up the Red Sea? You're not gonna be asking me to believe that, are you? You're not gonna ask me to really believe that a dead man rose from the grave? You're not gonna ask me to believe those radical things? So I don't wanna just be totally out but I also don't wanna be totally believing all that. Is there a third way?" And it turns out that those in third way churches have developed a third way theology.

Here's some of it, okay, and you can look this up if you want to. It's quite interesting. For example, let's say that you question the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. Now you and I, most of us would probably be like, "I wouldn't question that." But really some do and what happens is this, you begin to think, "Look, God sent his Son to die on a cross as a substitute to pay the penalty of our sins and to bear the wrath of God in our place," and so then people start thinking and go, "That sounds like child abuse. That sounds like child abuse that God would do such a thing to his Son." And then the water gets all muddied up and so people begin to step away and go, "I don't think I believe that. I can't believe that." And so here's how they spin it, Christ's substitutionary sacrifice on the cross now becomes a means that we now make sacrifices in our life. In other words, we're supposed to look at the cross, look at Christ and go, "That really is not a substitute. That's not really the wrath of God falling on Jesus. It's really Jesus being an example for us to show us how to sacrifice in life."

You see, that's third way theology, when you're uncomfortable with the substitutionary death of Christ or if you're uncomfortable with the resurrection of Christ. Let's take that one. Some would say, "Nah, nah, you can't expect me in 2018 to believe such a thing. Here's what I believe, I believe it was just symbolic of how we might overcome our faults and spiritually rise to become more than what we are." You see, that's what third way theology teaches and third way churches teach. If you're uncomfortable with resurrection and miracles and death on the cross, there's a way for you, you see? There's an option for you.

But most of all when you check this out, and I hope you will, third way is about seeking another way over sexual issues. In other words, there are those who say, "Look, I'm not comfortable with God's sexual ethics. I'm not comfortable with his design for sexuality. If two men want to be married, if two ladies want to be married, that should be okay." And so there's a third way, you see?

There's a third way, and of course, these are – do you see this – these are options. They're options. They're options to lead you astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ which, when it comes to this, it comes down to one final thing we'll see and that is there is one way. There's one way. There's not a halfway or a third way when it comes to sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Now, believe me, I know that some of you are probably sitting here going, "I don't have to be a Christian like he is. He's plum crazy." Or, "I don't have to be a Christian like her, she's plum crazy." Look, I'm not talking about that. I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about one thing: sincere pure devotion to Christ.

Now you may have all your hypocrite issues. I don't like hypocrites either. We all may have our issues and I want to cut through all the fog of that, okay? Cut through all the fog of that. You see, Satan would like to keep you right there, blinded, but I want to cut through all the fog and the heart of Christianity is sincere pure devotion to Jesus and there's only one way to that and what we see here is this, I'm going to tie it all together. Moses. Moses could have listened to these options and he could have said, "You know, guys, this might be the best offer we're gonna get. He said we could go worship our Lord

as long as we do it right here. We've better take that offer. It might not get any better." But what does he do? He says, "No, I'm not taking that." Well, then Pharaoh says, "Well, you can go, go out into the wilderness. Just don't go that far and you can do your sacrificing there." And Moses could have said, "You know, really, all that's really important is that we sacrifice to the Lord. It doesn't matter where." Today it would sound like this, "Certainly I can be a Christian without having to stop," you fill in the blank, okay? "Certainly I can be a Christian without having to stop doing this." Or I like this one we often hear, "Look, I prayed a sinner's prayer, surely that's sufficient. I did pray the prayer. Now all this sincere pure devotion to Christ, I don't know what you're talking about." You see, Moses refused to consider Pharaoh's options, choosing the one way of full obedience to the revealed will of God.

I want you to see that and here's how we're going to close: where can we get the strength for sincere pure devotion to Christ? Where can we get that? Because you see, I think most of you are sitting here today thinking, "Look, that is what I want. I want to live a pure, sincere, undivided, devoted, loyal life to Christ. That's what I really want." So where do we get the strength, the power to do that? I heard, let's see a verse first. Hebrews 12. Let's look at this first. I thought about this, this week, where could we land to see the power and the strength to live in sincere devotion to Christ? I think what we read earlier at the beginning of this service was from Hebrews 12. Notice what it says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Now the first thing I want to draw your attention to is the word "us, let us." It doesn't say "let you, let us." Now the Bible nowhere endorses individualistic Christianity. Let us. In other words, if you're going to successfully run this race which we'll identify in a moment, because to successfully do this, we have to do it together, we have to do it in the context of the community of faith. Let us.

Secondly notice, run. Now what does the writer mean when he says "let us run the race"? It is imagery for a swift obedience, loyalty and devotion to Jesus. Just what we've been saying. When the writer of Hebrews says, "Run the race," it's another way of saying, "Remain loyal. Remain devoted. Have an undivided heart as it comes to Christ but then lay aside, lay aside sin and weight that clings so closely." Why did he say it that way, that clings so closely? He's talking about that which has become so much a part of us yet it hinders us from a pure sincere devotion to Christ. There is stuff, look, there is stuff in your life and my life that can become so part of us. It doesn't necessarily have to be bad stuff, it's just stuff. It's stuff that's become so part of our life, "I've gotta have this. I've gotta do this. This is gonna be first. This is gonna be first. I'm gonna do this first. I'm gonna do this before I do anything else." Stuff that's become so clingy to us that it prevents us from the heart of Christianity.

People ask me all the time, "Brother Van, you know, where is everybody? And why can't some people string together two Sundays of worship?" I'm just going to say it, it's oftentimes it's priority. This is messed up priorities, stuff that clings so closely to us that, "I've gotta do this. This is gonna be first. I'm gonna do this before sincere and pure devotion to Christ." Why can't we find people to serve? Messed up priorities. This is not

hard to figure out. Why? Because just as Eve was seduced by Satan, that's how he's coming after you and me to lead us astray, what? Sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

So what do we do? Notice the very next statement, we're almost done, notice Hebrews 12:2, "looking to Jesus." Alright, lay aside weight and sin, all this stuff that keeps us from running which is what? Sincere pure devotion to Christ. Lay it aside, but at the same time do what? Look to Jesus. Now we're asking the question, "What will give us strength and power to be able to be like Moses and say, 'No'?" Look to Jesus.

I heard a lady on a podcast this week, she was talking about her four year old son and she brought him up in Sunday school and he was getting the concept and hearing the concept that Jesus had died for his sins. So he came to his mother and said, "What happened to Jesus?" And she said, "Well, he died on the cross." And he said, "Yeah, but what happened? How did that happen?" She said, "Well, they hung him on a cross." He said, "Well, how did they do that?" She said, "Well, they put nails in his hands and nails in his feet." He pondered for a moment and he stuck out his hands and he said, "Show me where they put the nails." So she said, "Well, right here and right here." And he pulled his hands away and he sat there for a moment and he said, "I didn't know Jesus did that." You see, for that four year old, he was looking to Jesus.

You see, to look to Jesus is to consider Jesus. It's to think deeply about who he is and what he has done. You see, that's what the writer is saying because if we're going to run effectively, if we're going to be able to say no to all the other options and remain pure and sincere in our devotion to Christ, we must look to Christ. Think deeply, you say, "Think deeply about what?" Think deeply about this, he was all the way in in his Father's plan. "I'm going to send my Son." Jesus was all the way in, undivided. All the way in. He came all the way from heaven to earth. He went all the way setting aside his glory, taking up on human flesh. He went all the way in his love and devotion and obedience to the Father. He had undivided loyalty to his Father. He went all the way to the cross. All the way. Obedient even unto death. And we're told that the same Spirit that raised him from the dead dwells within those of us who have received him. Why? To be with us all the way to the end, to help us, empower us, strengthen us to live a life of sincere and pure devotion to Jesus and to say no to all other options.

So let us run. Let us lay aside all the stuff that's become so close to us, so much a part of us. Lay it aside which means repent. Strip away all the things that are keeping you and I from a sincere pure devotion to Christ. Keep looking to Jesus because he was loyal all the way, and because he was loyal, he gives us his Spirit to empower us to be loyal to him. Let's go do that this week.