

Sermon 28, Let My Cattle Go!, Exodus 9:1-7

Proposition: Our hard-hearted sins bring pain on our animals too — and the blessing of being one of God’s people is so great that it brings blessing to our animals too.

- I. The Demand Reiterated: Let My People Go, v. 1
- II. The Threat Announced: Deadly Livestock Disease, vv. 2-3
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Luther on *The Freedom of a Christian*¹

The third incomparable grace of faith is this: that it unites the soul to Christ, as the wife to the husband, by which mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul are made one flesh. Now if they are one flesh, and if a true marriage—nay, by far the most perfect of all marriages—is accomplished between them (for human marriages are but feeble types of this one great marriage), then it follows that all they have becomes theirs in common, as well good things as evil things; so that whatsoever Christ possesses, that the believing soul may take to itself and boast of as its own, and whatever belongs to the soul, that Christ claims as His.

If we compare these possessions, we shall see how inestimable is the gain. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation; the soul is full of sin, death, and condemnation. Let faith step in, and then sin, death, and hell will belong to Christ, and grace, life, and salvation to the soul. For, if He is a Husband, He must needs take to Himself that which is His wife's, and at the same time, impart to His wife that which is His. For, in giving her His own body and Himself, how can He but give her all that is His? And, in taking to Himself the body of His wife, how can He but take to Himself all that is hers?

In this is displayed the delightful sight, not only of communion, but of a prosperous warfare, of victory, salvation, and redemption. For, since Christ is God and man, and is such a Person as neither has sinned, nor dies, nor is condemned, nay, cannot sin, die, or be condemned, and since His righteousness, life, and salvation are invincible, eternal, and almighty,—when I say, such a Person, by the wedding-ring of faith, takes a share in the sins, death, and hell of His wife, nay, makes them His own, and deals with them no otherwise than as if they were His, and as if He Himself had sinned; and when He suffers, dies, and descends to hell, that He may overcome all things, and since sin, death, and hell cannot swallow Him up, they must needs be swallowed up by Him in stupendous conflict. For His righteousness rises above the sins of all men; His life is more powerful than all death; His salvation is more unconquerable than all hell.

¹ [Concerning Christian Liberty. by Martin Luther \(gutenberg.org\)](http://www.gutenberg.org)

Thus the believing soul, by the pledge of its faith in Christ, becomes free from all sin, fearless of death, safe from hell, and endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of its Husband Christ. Thus He presents to Himself a glorious bride, without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word; that is, by faith in the word of life, righteousness, and salvation. Thus He betrothes her unto Himself "in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies" (Hosea ii. 19, 20).

Who then can value highly enough these royal nuptials? Who can comprehend the riches of the glory of this grace? Christ, that rich and pious Husband, takes as a wife a needy and impious harlot, redeeming her from all her evils and supplying her with all His good things. It is impossible now that her sins should destroy her, since they have been laid upon Christ and swallowed up in Him, and since she has in her Husband Christ a righteousness which she may claim as her own, and which she can set up with confidence against all her sins, against death and hell, saying, "If I have sinned, my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned; all mine is His, and all His is mine," as it is written, "My beloved is mine, and I am His" (Cant. ii. 16). This is what Paul says: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," victory over sin and death, as he says, "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. xv. 56, 57).

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I was listing to one of you the other day the tangible financial benefits that being part of this congregation has brought to his life. They were really pretty impressive, and by some measures actually kept this fellow out of homelessness. As cool as that is, though, I bring it up not because it's cool but because it points to the same truth that this passage teaches: The blessing that God gives to His people is so overwhelming that it spills over and blesses everyone affiliated with them too. That's the positive side of it, shown by the way that Israel's cattle lived. But the flip side is equally true: The curse on God's enemies is so strong that it too spills over and includes those affiliated with them, right down to their animals. That's why animals die in this world. It's because animals are affiliated with us, subject to us, and so our sin has subjected them to futility, pain, and death. We fill the earth and subdue it, and so it cries out in pain as it tastes the pain of our sin. Don't be hard-hearted and disobedient, and thus bring pain on your animals. Instead, submit yourself to Christ, and you and your beasts will know His blessing.

I. The Demand Reiterated: Let My People Go, v. 1

Our text begins with the by-now-familiar reiteration of the demand that Pharaoh let the people go in God's name. Again, though we know what this demand is, don't gloss over it. Exodus is about the knowledge of God, and one of the key points that the story makes is that God delivers His people from slavery so they can serve Him. If you are enslaved to an earthly master, that makes it harder for you to serve God. It doesn't make it impossible to serve God, but it does make it harder.

Here's the reality: If you are enslaved to sin, you are not serving Yahweh. You are serving sin. And when you serve sin, that has consequences that spread out all around you.

II. The Threat Announced: Deadly Livestock Disease, vv. 2-3

The threat this time is that if Pharaoh won't let Israel go, God's hand (not just His finger, which produced the lice) will send a very severe epidemic disease onto the Egyptians' livestock. We are not talking just one or two sub-breeds, either — all the Morgan horses will die, but the Appaloosas will be spared. Oh no. We are talking about all breeds of horses, all kinds of donkeys, camels of every type and cattle of all breeds. We're also talking goats and sheep. Basically, God is going to send a disease so severe that Egypt is going to lose all its stock. Now, we eat a lot of pork and chicken; I don't know whether Egyptians also ate pork and chicken in the days of Moses. But if you think about the Big 5 domesticated animals — horse, cow, pig, sheep, and goat — all of them are referenced here, if you consider cows and pigs as being in a herd while sheep and goats are in a flock. Without these domesticated animals, human beings would have a much harder time in life. And God was effectively going to wipe out Egypt's share of the world animal supply.

Now, the previous plagues were more nuisance than actually deadly. But here God is revealing to Egypt that if they are in solidarity with Pharaoh, they will experience the sufferings of Pharaoh. Their covenant head is racking up a curse for them.

Now, imagine for a moment that your capital was entirely wrapped up in livestock. That is not true for most Americans, nor even for most residents of Campbell County. But a few hundred years previously, in Joseph's day, all of the land in Egypt had been sold to Pharaoh in exchange for food. Now, we don't know whether Egyptians had gotten their land back by Moses' time. But let's say they hadn't. So imagine: everything that you currently have in the bank, in real estate, and in other capital assets would suddenly be transferred into live cattle, sheep, horses, goats, and camels. You became a stockman, running your herds and flocks on government land leased from Pharaoh. All of your real property is on four hooves. And now comes this announcement: It's all going to die. This is before flock insurance was invented. This is before government bailouts were invented. You're simply going to take a loss — not a loss for tax purposes, but a genuine loss, a loss of everything you called your own.

That's the threat of this plague, when we think about it from the side of the ordinary Egyptian. When we think about it from the side of the animals, it's even worse. The message now is that through no fault of your own, you, a poor dumb beast, have to pay the ultimate price for the folly and sin of your owner's king. Because Pharaoh is hard-hearted, sheep will die. Goats will die. Camels will perish and cattle fall down dead, disease-ridden, left to rot in the pasture.

III. The Promise of Safety for Israel's Livestock, v. 4

But in Goshen, not a single animal will perish. God is making it so clear that even Pharaoh can see it. If you're affiliated with Yahweh, you will live, and that life will spill over to your animals too. If you're affiliated with Pharaoh, you will die, and that death will kill your animals too.

Now, this is not because Egyptian animals are more wicked than Israelite animals. It is because God works in households, in families, in groups. He believes in group solidarity. If

you're part of a land that is blessed, you get blessed too, even if you personally are a rotten sinner. If you're part of a rotten family, you get cursed, even if you personally are a straight arrow who has never descended into being like your family. The cattle in Goshen weren't better cattle; they were cattle who belonged to God's people.

IV. The Threat Carried Out, vv. 5-6

So God sets a time, and He does it. He said "Tomorrow," and it happened when He said.

No Israelite animal died. All the Egyptian animals died. It was just like God had said.

V. Pharaoh Learns the Truth, v. 7a

Pharaoh wanted to check on this idea that Israel's animals were spared. What a rhetorical masterstroke to catch Moses lying! How glorious to find that whatever Egypt was going through, it was happening to the Hebrew slaves too! But of course, try as they might, the commission simply couldn't report such an egregious falsehood. The cattle were grazing like normal over in Goshen. The sheep were flocking around their shepherds as usual. The camels strode across the desert, the goats butted each other, the pigs grunted in their sties (remember, this is before Israel was forbidden to eat pork). The commission reported back: All of Israel's livestock are fine! Nothing untoward is happening over there.

VI. Pharaoh Ignores the Truth, v. 7b

And so Pharaoh falls down and worships Yahweh, right? Wrong. Pharaoh knows that the truth is that God can take every life in Egypt if He so chooses. And because that's an uncomfortable truth, he ignores it. He pretends it ain't so. He makes his heart heavy with unrighteousness and refuses to let the people go.

Are your animals well taken care of? Are you living in a way that will attract blessing to your family?

Pharaoh brought death on the livestock of Egypt through his stubbornness. And you will bring death on your family and your animals if you refuse to obey God. Above all, this principle of blessing spilling out on those around the blessed one comes to perfection in the life of Jesus Christ. Through Him, it was more than animals who were blessed. It was people too. Take refuge in Him today. Amen.