

## **Getting to Know Yahweh**

Exodus 6–14

Turn to Exodus 6. This sermon is about knowing God, and in particular knowing how God wanted Israel to understand his name “Yahweh.” This sermon is called “Getting to know Yahweh,” because God keeps saying, “this is how they will know that I am Yahweh.”

This is part of a series of messages on Exodus, and the Series is called, “Salvation and the Name.” Another catchy title from Ed. Let’s start with salvation. For New Testament believers, our salvation rests on a story, the Easter story that we just celebrated.

The story of Jesus suffering and dying in our place, and rising from the dead, is at the centre of our salvation story. The Jesus story is our salvation story.

Israel also had a salvation story. God rescued them from the Egyptians. God led them out of slavery, across the Red Sea, and into the wilderness. At Mt Sinai, God covenanted with them. And then God had them build a tabernacle, a little portable temple, so that he could live in their midst and travel with them. The Exodus story was their salvation story.

And especially at the beginning of the story, up to Exodus 14, Yahweh ties his name to this story. Yahweh wants his name connected to *this* story in particular. When we think about this story, we need to think “Salvation,” and we need to think “the Name, Yahweh.” Yahweh wants his name to be joined to this story. So the series is called, “Salvation and the Name,” and today’s message is “Getting to Know Yahweh.”

### **1 God’s Name – Exodus 3:13–15**

God has a name. “God” is not a name, “Lord” is not a name, and “The Almighty” is not a name. They are good ways to speak of our God, but not names. He has a personal name, and it is “Yahweh.”

At the burning bush, Moses asked God, “If the Israelites ask for your name, what shall I tell them.” The Israelites will want some kind of handle on what God will do. God answers, “I AM WHAT I AM. Moses, tell the ‘I AM’ sent me to you.” “Yahweh” in Hebrew is not exactly how one says “I am” in Hebrew, but it is close.

“I AM WHO I AM.” God will always be true to his own nature. God can be counted on to be who he is. That’s the likely sense of “I AM WHO I AM.” And we find out his nature, what he does when he’s true to himself, by what he does in Egypt and later on at Mt Sinai. He rescues his people and he covenants with them.

## 2 The Name, and what Israel will Know – Exodus 6:2–3, 7–8

<sup>2</sup> God said to Moses, “I am Yahweh. <sup>3</sup> I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, **but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself fully known to them.**

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob did use God’s name. When God says here that he did not make himself known, he means: “I did not *explain* my name to them, I never told them what it *meant*.” Now in the exodus he *will* make himself fully known.

Moses, say to the Israelites, “I am Yahweh.... <sup>7</sup> I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. **Then you will know that I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.** <sup>8</sup> And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am Yahweh.’”

I will take you as my people, and I will be your God, and **then you will know that I am Yahweh your God.** Once Israel has been rescued, and once God has covenanted with them, *then* they will know what Yahweh is like.

Why is God acting? Why will he do this? So that Israel will *know* that Yahweh is their God. God rescues Israel so Israel will *know*. God wants his people to *know* him.

## 3 What the Egyptians will know – Exodus 7:3–5

<sup>3</sup> But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in Egypt, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> **And the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh** when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.

God’s motive: the Egyptians will know: it is not only the Israelites that find out what Yahweh is like. The Egyptians also find out, they learn from what they see Yahweh do. The Egyptians will see Yahweh bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Once *that* has happened, both the Israelites and the Egyptians will know that Yahweh has been there.

At this point Exodus describes the first three plagues: 1<sup>st</sup> plague = Nile to blood; 2<sup>nd</sup> plague = frogs; 3<sup>rd</sup> plague = gnats, some small pestiferous insect. Obviously mosquitos.

## 4 What Pharaoh will know – Exodus 8:22–23

<sup>22</sup> “But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there, **so that you [Pharaoh] will know that I, Yahweh, am in this land.** <sup>23</sup> I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This sign will occur tomorrow.’ “

“So that you will know.” God’s motive is to rescue, and also to be known. Yahweh demonstrates what he is like, so that Pharaoh will know him.

And how will Yahweh do to be known? “*I will deal differently with Goshen where my people live. I will make a distinction between my people and your people.*” God rescues *his* people from *other* people. He makes a distinction, deals differently. Then Pharaoh will know that Yahweh is “in this land.”

Usually in this life it is not clear that God deals differently with his people than with unbelievers. God has great patience with the ungodly. But we have not seen the End. And the End will be like the exodus. Yahweh will make a distinction, and it will be evident to everyone. When he makes a distinction, he’s showing his true nature.

Here we have three more plagues: 4<sup>th</sup> plague = flies; 5<sup>th</sup> = livestock disease; 6<sup>th</sup> = boils.

### **5 What Pharaoh will know, and what the whole earth will hear – Exodus 9:13–16**

*Then Yahweh said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, <sup>14</sup> or this time 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.’”*

God’s motive is not just to get Israel out of Egypt as fast as possible – he could have done that with one plague that killed every Egyptian. Nor did God want to be as hard on Egypt as possible. Neither of these are God’s motive.

Yahweh wants the world to know what it is like to be one of Yahweh’s people, and what it is like to be an enemy of his people. Once you know that, you understand his name.

“*That my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.*” God wants everyone to know this name. Any nation out there and any individual is free to drop their gods and come to Yahweh. Joshua 2 tells of Rahab, a pagan prostitute, coming to Yahweh. Other Gentiles did this. No problem.

7<sup>th</sup> plague = hail. Through Moses, God warned Pharaoh that he would send hail. In 9:20–21 it says that the Egyptian officials “*that feared the word of Yahweh*” put their slaves and livestock in shelter from the coming hail.

Those “*that did not regard the word of Yahweh*” left their slaves and livestock in the open, and lost them to the hail. The Egyptians had a choice, which some took advantage of, and some did not. God’s intention was not to make Egypt pay, but to show what he was like, and to get Israel out.

## 6 What Happens in Pharaoh's Heart?

Pharaoh refused to let Israel leave Egypt. The Bible says God hardened his heart. We need to talk about what God is actually doing in Pharaoh.

In our language, the softer feelings are in the heart, affection and love and sympathy. For us, "hard hearted" means the person has none of the softer feelings. In the Bible, "heart" is different. In the Bible, the heart means the whole inner person. Heart includes our mind and our will.

The word translated "harden" usually means "strengthen, to make strong." When we read that Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart, we should understand that Yahweh strengthened Pharaoh's will, made him strong-willed.

First let's look at what Pharaoh himself wanted, without God acting on him. When left to himself, what does Pharaoh want to do? I'll quickly read eight texts.

*5:2 Pharaoh said, "Who is Yahweh, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh, and I will not let Israel go."*

*7:14 Yahweh said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding, he refuses to let my people go."*

*7:22 After the Nile turned to blood, "Pharaoh's heart became hard (his will became strong), and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron."* Pharaoh does this on his own.

*8:15 When Pharaoh saw that there was relief [from the frogs], he hardened his heart (he strengthened his will), and would not listen.*

*8:19 After the plague of mosquitos, 3<sup>rd</sup> plague, it says Pharaoh's heart was hard (his will was strong), and he would not listen.*

*9:7 After the plague on the livestock, 5<sup>th</sup> plague, it says "Pharaoh's heart was unyielding, and he would not let the people go."* This is Pharaoh making his own choice.

*9:17 Yahweh says to Pharaoh after the 6<sup>th</sup> plague, the boils, "You still set yourself against my people, and will not let them go."*

*9:34 After the plague of hail stopped, that was the 7<sup>th</sup> plague, "Pharaoh and his officials hardened their hearts."*

All these texts tell us what Pharaoh does without God doing anything to Pharaoh's heart or will. Pharaoh wants to ignore Moses and Aaron, and Yahweh, and he wants to keep Israel in Egypt, never let them go. That's what Pharaoh wants, and he's determined.

When Yahweh makes Pharaoh hard hearted, that is, when Yahweh makes Pharaoh strong willed and determined, he never guides what Pharaoh will choose. Pharaoh was entirely free willed through all of this. What Yahweh did was strengthen Pharaoh's will, so that Pharaoh would not let go of what he really wanted. He was always free to change his mind. After every plague, he had a chance to change his mind.

This story is about Yahweh. In this story, Yahweh put on a special demonstration of how he keeps covenant promises and rescues his people. Yahweh brought to power, in Egypt, a Pharaoh who on his own was a stubborn man who wanted to keep Israel in Egypt. At times Yahweh strengthened his determination to have his way. That's the story of Pharaoh's heart.

## **7 What Israel will know, and Children and Grandchildren – Exodus 10:1–2**

*<sup>1</sup> Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these signs of mine among them <sup>2</sup> that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am Yahweh."*

Back in Exodus 6, the first time God says he's doing this so someone will know, it is so his own people Israel will know. And here near the end that occurs again. God puts on this demonstration so that Israel will know.

God explains his motive here in two stages. In 10:1, God hardened the heart of Pharaoh and his officials *so that I may perform these signs of mine*. That's the first stage.

10:2 gives the second stage: I perform these signs of mine *that you may tell your children and grandchildren* this whole story and *that you may know that I am Yahweh*.

God's motive at the very start was to rescue his people Israel from their misery. That is God's first motive - compassion for his people. But once God begins to rescue, we learn that he has another motive. God rescues in a particular way, because he wants to show everyone what he is like. God wants his name to be connected to this rescue, this demonstration.

"I hardened their hearts so that I can perform these signs. I am performing these signs so that you will know that I am Yahweh, and so that you will tell your children and grandchildren." God had no intention of doing this for every generation. God made that clear at the start. He expects the story to carry on by being told and retold.

We are the real audience. This whole demonstration is for all of Yahweh's people still to come, including us. He wants us to see his true colours.

At this point we have the 8th plague = locusts; the 9th plague = darkness; and the 10th plague = death of Egypt's firstborn, people and animals.

Then the Egyptians are finally ready to be rid of the Israelites. Pharaoh actually changes his mind, as he was free to do all along. So Israel leaves. And then Israel gets to the shore of the Red Sea, and we again see Yahweh acting to make himself known.

### **8 Yahweh will be Honoured, and the Egyptians will Know – Exodus 14:3-4**

God said to Moses, *“Pharaoh will think, ‘The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.’ And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh.”*

The first ten plagues were in the land of Egypt. The ten plagues basically ruined Egypt and the Egyptians. But it was not a military victory. At the Red Sea, Pharaoh brings out the best of his army. Now we see Yahweh in a military battle.

*14:6–7 - Pharaoh had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them.*

In the ten plagues, Yahweh has shown himself to rule over every part of Egyptian land and life. At the Red Sea Yahweh takes on Pharaoh’s army. The Egyptians and the Israelites need to know how God shows up on the day of battle, a day of war.

When armies go into battle, they bring weapons they have made. When God goes into battle, he uses what he made. He uses rain and wind and water and hail and ice and thunder and lightning and fire and smoke and earthquake. Humans are okay with all of these in small amounts. But God uses whatever amount he wants.

### **9 Again: Yahweh Honoured and the Egyptians will Know – Exodus 14:16–18**

*Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. **The Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.***

<sup>23</sup> *The Egyptians pursued Israel, and all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea....* <sup>26</sup> *Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.”* <sup>27</sup> *Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the Lord swept them into the sea.* <sup>28</sup> *The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.*

### **So, What did we Learn about Yahweh?**

Israel very rarely saw God in action like this, just as we very rarely see God in action like this. Basically never. And yet our God wants his name connected with these actions. He wants to be known by something we have only in a story, and he knows we have it only in this story. He wants us to know what he does when he is true to himself. We count on Yahweh to be Yahweh, and it looks like this.

I don't know how this strikes you. It is not how we usually talk about our God. I find it a little frightening, but mostly I'm delighted to have a God who takes care of his people in this way. We count on Yahweh to be Yahweh, and it looks like this. Amen.

**PRAYER:** Yahweh, it is hard for us to grasp that every time we pray to you, we are talking to the God that wants to be known by these stories. We also are your people, and you have compassion on us as you did on them. Thank you for this window into your mind. You made so clear that you want us to know you as the Yahweh of the exodus. We worship you and we praise you and we are so glad you're our God and we're your people. Amen.

**BENEDICION:** May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.