

A Biblical Rumble Strip

Exodus 7:1-6

Intro:

Camping... road trips... warning strips on the sides of the road... You know what those are called? I didn't. So I Googled, and found that they're called Rumble strips, and many other names. I thought this, from Wikipedia, was interesting:

“Rumble strips, also known as sleeper lines, alert strips, audible lines, sleepy bumps, wake up calls, car farts, growlers, drift lines, waker-uppers, and drunk bumps, are a road safety feature to alert inattentive drivers of potential danger, by causing a tactile vibration and audible rumbling transmitted through the wheels into the vehicle interior. A rumble strip is applied along the direction of travel following an edgeline or centerline, to alert drivers when they drift from their lane.”

When we're drowsy, or just not paying close attention to the road, rumble strips are there to startle and let us know that we're drifting from the safe path of travel. They're there to make our heart pound, our eyes open, our grip on the steering wheel tighten, so that we correct our course of travel back to the center of the lane.

There are some passages in Scripture that remind me of rumble strips and Exodus 7:1-6, and especially verses 3-5 is one of those passages. These verses shake us up by reminding us that **God's fame is the ultimate aim of His gracious redemption**. That is, God's ultimate purpose in the plan of redemption, indeed, His ultimate purpose in all of creation, is *that His supreme power be seen and acknowledged by every angelic being and by every human being!*

See, Scripture lays out for us a path of truth about God on which to walk. But, because of our fallen, sinful human tendencies we are prone to drifting into error in our thinking about God. We are more comfortable with some truths about God than with others. So, we get spiritually drowsy, mentally complacent and emotionally distracted, and we quickly drift to one side or the other.

We all need regular course corrections in the way we think about God and the Christian life. So God gives us Biblical rumbles strips to wake us up. To shake us out of comfortable, but deadly dangerous, ways of thinking about Him. As this passage shakes us up today, we're just going to look at two ways that we may find that we need to correct our course.

This Passage Reorients the Way That We Read the Bible

Exodus 7:5 gives us an orientation that we will need to properly navigate the upcoming weeks, the narrative of the plagues and Israel's eventual departure from Egypt. It helps us to make sense of them. But more than that, I believe it gives us the proper orientation for reading the whole Bible.

Let's read verses 2-5 again, and see if you can feel the way these verses jar us, and wake us up to correct our course.

7:2-5 You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land. (Here comes the rumble strip) BUT... I will harden Pharaoh's heart (also 4:21), and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, 4 Pharaoh will not listen to you.

This should jar us! I think God intends it to. How does this make sense!? "I'm going to rescue my people. I'm going to get you out of this oppression. BUT, I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he won't listen to you for a long time."

Look, if God's highest aim is simply to get his people out from under the oppression of Egypt, then this doesn't make any sense. He could have gotten them out of Egypt quickly a thousand different ways! Why do it by hardening Pharaoh's heart!? In fact, if the comfort, peace and well-being of His people is God's *highest* aim, then it doesn't make any sense that He brought them to Egypt in the first place, and it sure doesn't make any sense that He left them there for 400 years as things went from bad to worse! Now He's hardening Pharaoh's heart so that it takes even longer for them to get out!?

The fact that God tells Moses that He will harden Pharaoh's heart alerts us to the reality that in redemption God's *highest, most ultimate aim*, does not center directly on the people He is redeeming. What is His ultimate aim? It's here in the next verse...

4b *“Then I will lay my hand on Egypt...*

(this is not a gentle image! More like “I’m gonna lay my hand up alongside yo head!”)

and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. 5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.”

God created this scenario in history, God will harden Pharaoh’s heart, God’s gonna lay the smack down on Egypt, for this reason- so that the Egyptians will KNOW that He is the LORD!

This is the highest aim of God in all the drama of the plagues, the rescue through the Red Sea, and so on. It’s that His absolute sovereignty over all earthly powers will be undeniably displayed! *This* is God’s driving passion in the Exodus. God is not only, or even primarily, interested in rescuing the Israelites. The driving motivation in His plan of redemption is to bring one of the most powerful nations on earth to its knees, so that when He finally brings *His* people out of Egypt, all of Egypt will know that He *alone* is Lord. Not Pharaoh, not the river god, not the frog god, not the sun god. They would have no choice but to admit that Yahweh alone is sovereign over all things. God’s highest aim in the Exodus is to make a name for Himself that is above every other name.

This is the key to making sense of the Exodus narrative. But more than that, God’s pursuit of His own fame is the key to understanding the overarching narrative of the entire Bible. If you read the Bible without this key, it will not open for you. As the old catechisms teach us Scripture has been given to us, primarily, to reveal who God is and then, in light of that revelation, how God requires us to respond to Him. So, if we read the Bible without a clear understanding that it is written to show us the God-centeredness of God, then it will not have the effect in us and on us that God intends it to. If this isn’t how you read the Bible, you may need a course correction here.

Lest you think that I’m making too much of one little phrase, I want to give you a brief look at how this theme of God’s passion for His own glory runs throughout the Bible. We find it in the OT books of history, like this, from 1 Samuel 12:22 - *For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. 1 Samuel 12:22*

In the wisdom books we find dozens of appeals to God on the basis of this- God's pursuit of His own glory. Appeals like Psalm 79:9 - *Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake! Psalm 79:9*

This stream of truth, revealing God's passion for His own fame, runs on into the Prophets. For example, in Isaiah 48, when God tells His people why He will not destroy them completely, though they have rejected Him over and over again, He declares, "*For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another!*" Isaiah 48:11.

This isn't just an Old Testament theme, either. It runs on into the New Testament, where the Apostle Paul exclaims in Romans 11:36 "*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen!*" Romans 11:36

And again, in Philippians 2, where we see that God's aim to put His glory on display has been realized most fully and finally in Jesus Christ. *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Philippians 2:9-11

That "every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!" The epicenter of God's actions is His desire for His glory to be displayed and recognized throughout all the nations. *This is God's ultimate aim in redemption!*

So, we must learn to read the Bible with this in view. We must learn to love seeing how God's pursuit of His fame is displayed through Scripture. Large portions of the Bible will not make any sense at all unless we read them with the understanding that **God's fame is the ultimate aim of His gracious redemption.**

We live in, what I think history will show to be, a therapeutically obsessed time and place. Therapeutic- Having a beneficial effect on the body or mind. Producing a useful or favorable result or effect. We look for everything to heal us, to help us avoid pain of any kind, to be *immediately* beneficial for

helping us avoid discomfort of any kind. And I'm afraid this dramatically affects the way that we read the Bible.

While there is healing to be found in the Scriptures, that is not the primary way that we should read it. If we read the Bible through a therapeutic lens, looking for it to make us immediately comfortable, or even *first and foremost*, looking for it to fix our messed up lives, we will find most of the Bible to be boring, useless, or even dangerous because it challenges our conception of God and threatens our comfort. For instance, what use is a genealogy for healing my heart after someone has deeply betrayed me? None! What use is historical narrative for picking me up when I feel depressed? Not much! But, what use is a genealogy or historical narrative for displaying God's pursuit of His own glory? Much, in every way! They demonstrate His wisdom, His power, His faithfulness!

I'm not saying, "There are no words of healing or help in the Bible for the weary soul or the wounded heart." There are many, and they are precious. But, the *primary* way that our souls will be encouraged and our wounded hearts will be healed is to be caught up into the wonder of *God's* story, not obsessing over our own story. We will find true rest for our souls and healing for our hearts when we stop looking for what the Bible has to say about us and focus instead on what it says about God's worth, beauty, and majesty.

Ask yourself "Am I really submitted to the authority of Scripture, even if that means being shaken up and drastically reoriented in the way I conceive of God?" You may find that you need, for the good of your own soul, to be reoriented in the way you read the Bible.

This Passage Reorients Our Joy As the Redeemed People of God

This flows naturally out of the first course correction, because when we see on every page of Scripture that **God's fame is the ultimate aim of His gracious redemption**, it will reorient the source of our joy. Three ways that I want to point out.

1. We'll Find Joy In Being the Display of God's Triumph Over Satan

Just as the Israelites marching freely out of Egypt was a demonstration to Pharaoh of his impotence compared to Yahweh, so God has marched us out of the kingdom of darkness and into His kingdom of light, in plain sight, for Satan to see, to rub his face in his defeat. We are what God uses to demonstrate

to Satan what a fool he was to ever think he could successfully pull off a rebellion against His Sovereign Creator! As Colossians 2 says, Satan and all his minions were put to open shame as God rescued us through the Cross of Jesus Christ! And not just us! We find joy in knowing that we are but a miniscule part of the numberless throng of people from every tribe, nation and tongue that will one day worship before the throne of God as an everlasting testament to His sovereign power!

2. We'll Find Joy In Demonstrating God's Power In Our Weakness

In Exodus 7:6, we read that God worked His plan of redemption for His people through Moses and Aaron as they did "just as the LORD commanded." What did they do? They proclaimed to Pharaoh only the words that they received from God. And they did before Pharaoh only the simple acts of faith that God commanded them. They threw a staff on the ground. They raised a staff over the water or over the land. That's it. That's all they did. It took no special skills or abilities. Just the faith to obey. And God worked miracles through them!

In the same way, God works His sovereign purpose in the world through us, the Church, as we humbly do just as the LORD has commanded us. Doing things that seem simple and often insignificant, and trusting the power of God to work through them.

Proclaiming God's Word alone as authoritative. Not embracing or proclaiming worldly philosophies that become obstacles to the Gospel. Depending on the power of the Gospel that we proclaim to be used by God to make His glory ever more clear in the world.

And humbling doing before the world the simple acts of faith that God calls us to. Things like speaking with kindness. Loving instead hating. Being gentle instead of harsh. Patiently, consistently, over decades teaching our children to know and treasure Jesus. Having a meal with those we disagree with and maybe even dislike. Pursuing unity within the Church by refusing to gossip, slander, or even harbor slanderous thoughts about one another. These are the seemingly insignificant acts through which God miraculously works out His sovereign power over human hearts whereby He will harden some hearts and soften other hearts!

Our proclamation of the Word and our lives of humble obedience are the ways in which we have been made "like God" to the world. We are ambassadors, speaking on behalf of God, appealing both with our lives and our words to the world- "Be reconciled to God!"

This appeal will soften and humble some hearts, but many, like Pharaoh, will be hardened in their unbelief. So our joy is not contingent on the outcome, but on our ever-hopeful obedience to the one who displays His power through our weakness.

3. We'll Find Joy In Displaying God's Glorious Grace

We are born with hearts as hard as Pharaoh's. We are all born with hearts that reject all or part of who God is. And God would be just to harden all of our hearts as He did Pharaoh's as righteous judgment for this sinful arrogance. Our hearts were hardened in our sins, God is rich in mercy, and He has freely chosen not to make His sovereign power known only through judgment. But for all who have thrown themselves on God's mercy that because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Many of you know that those beautiful words that I just said are from Ephesians chapter 2. So you may also know that Ephesians chapter one says, three times, that God has redeemed us in this way- by grace, through faith- to the praise of His glorious grace! God's fame is the ultimate aim of His gracious redemption, and this does not destroy or inhibit our joy! God's pursuit of His fame carries us along with it into the only joy that is real and lasting, the joy of displaying the glory of His grace as we delight in Him forever.