

Leaving Putnam City North's gym on Tuesday we saw a panther. A life size panther looking like it was stalking its next meal with a mouth that looked like it could tear flesh. People were walking right by it without even being worried. Of course a big reason why is because it was a statue. This panther was harmless. The hard statue poses no threat.

Some people view God the same way, much like a statue. He may sound strong and powerful. He may have others fooled into thinking he's real. But he isn't fooling them. They know with confidence he isn't real and he can't really do anything for or against them. To these people God is as good as a hard statue, harmless and posing no threat.

At the time of Moses, Pharaoh the leader of Egypt thought the same thing. He had a host of gods he worshiped. There were gods to govern the rain, gods to bring about the seasons, gods that guided the growth and productivity of the crops. Pharaoh was comfortable with these gods because he knew they were wood or stone. Stone, like his own heart when it came to God. Over and over Pharaoh completely turned himself off to God. His heart became harder and harder like a statue. Pharaoh didn't know it, but he was in a bad spot. You would be too if you shut off God from your life. Slowly your heart turns hard just like Pharaoh's. Today's first lesson shows God doesn't want things that way. He sends...

### **Blood that breaks hard hearts**

The deep booming voice of Charlton Heston is all I remember of the movie *The Ten Commandments*. "Let my people go." That scene and famous quote are all many people know about Moses. What they maybe don't realize is that quote is really part of the accounts of the ten plagues. You've heard of the ten plagues against Egypt; miraculous signs and wonders done by God through Moses? Those signs were done against Pharaoh, the leader of ancient Egypt. He was the one not letting the people of God go. The plagues were God's way of convincing him.

Safe to say the Egyptians would not exist without the Nile River. Ancient Egypt depended on the great river for its survival. Drinking water, irrigation, and fish for food were just some of the ways the Nile River supported their population. So much did they depend on it that they worshiped it as a god. There really was no better place for God to catch Pharaoh's attention than the waters of the Nile. **"This is what the LORD says: by this you will know that I am the LORD: with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed to blood. The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water."** God laid out exactly what would happen to Pharaoh. There could be no doubt God was behind these events.

Someone who doesn't believe in the Bible's accuracy might look for a way to explain away this miracle. Could it be that this was just late summer floods bringing large quantities of red sediment down the river making it look a bloody color? This red sediment could explain the water being muddy and undrinkable. But in no way can it explain all the waters turning to blood. **"The LORD said to Moses, tell Aaron, take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs—and they will turn to blood. Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars."** In full view of Pharaoh and all his servants, God took something that was a blessing to the people of Egypt and made it a curse. All the water connected to the Nile became blood, blood designed to break their hard hearts.

Hopefully I don't have to warn you about worshipping the Oklahoma River. But I do have to warn you if you make something, anything else an idol. Our jobs can easily become first priority in our lives. The prospect of nice overtime dollars creeps in on Sundays and shuts out worship. The extra padding in our paychecks makes us think we have the cushion to survive should the economy go bad. Or our money becomes the source of our happiness or contentment. And that's just with our jobs. School, pleasure, friends, really anything we let take priority over God in our lives is a demonstration of the hard heart of a sinner inside each one of us.

Hard hearts respond to the dramatic, which God with a river flowing with blood. Where the Egyptians expected to see fresh clean water they saw only thick soupy blood. No more fish, no more drinking water, no more living. Certainly caught their attention. Sometimes God does something dramatic to bust through our hard hearts. Losing a job where we expect to have one can shake us up. Not getting a raise or promotion can make us wonder how we'll be taken care of. But our condition requires more than lost jobs or no promotions. Our hard hearts require blood to break through. Not blood flowing in the Oklahoma River or in Lake Hefner though, blood flowing from our Savior's side. Blood breaks our hard hearts.

Seeing the precious Nile River turned to blood may have shocked Pharaoh a bit. But was it enough to turn him to the true and living God? As with many times before Pharaoh turned to his magicians. **"The Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said."** Though on a much smaller scale Pharaoh's people, probably with the help of Satan, accomplished a similar miracle. Pharaoh wouldn't have to believe anything Moses did; he wouldn't have to worry about their God. His heart was as hard as ever.

When are the times you really wanted to do something you knew was a sin? At a party with friends, all alone with a coworker after work, on your computer alone in your room? Maybe momentarily you were stopped, something deep inside saying you shouldn't. But it wasn't enough and you committed the sin anyway. That's a symptom of sinful hard hearts. Once we've committed the sin the guilt can make us wonder if the blood of Christ is enough to make these sins go away.

The blood of Jesus is the only thing strong enough to crack our hard hearts. Blood from the cross is the only weapon that can rescue us. Jesus' blood is the good news we hope for. In the midst of God punishing Jesus on the cross he shows us mercy. Blood is good news because it's provided in love. It's provided to take away our greatest problem so our hard hearts won't drag us to hell. The blood of Christ breaks through our hard hearts to rescue us from our sins.

God replaces our sinful hard hearts with hearts of flesh; a heart inhabited by our Savior empowered by the Holy Spirit. These hearts of flesh beat with the blood of Christ, blood so pure and so precious we can only respond in one way. We respond in love. We love God and give him thanks; we love our friends and neighbors and show them true love from God. Your heart might be moved by the images from Haiti, and that's expected. Let those hearts flow with the ever present blood of Christ. Find ways to demonstrate God's love by giving and sharing aid where you can, praying for those people, and praying that someone shares Christ with them. A heart of flesh with the blood of Jesus flowing will always live for the one who gave it.

**"Blood was everywhere in Egypt."** It's kind of a gross thing to say and even grosser to think about. But this blood had a purpose. God saw the hard heart of Pharaoh and all of Egypt. Something had to break through that. Making the river flow with blood got their attention. But this blood only broke through a few hard hearts. When God takes something in your life that's getting a little too important or high in priority and takes it away or makes it worthless recognize God trying to get your attention. Then recognize what's most important, the blood of Christ. There's blood that God uses to break our hard hearts; the blood of Christ that will not fail.