

EXODUS 8

INTRODUCTION

There is nothing more frustrating than having to repeat yourself time and time again. It might be an old person who is very hard of hearing and you have to shout in their ear a number of times to make them hear. Perhaps its children who although they hear you do not heed you and so you have to scream up the stairs about 4 or 5 times to call them for dinner. Well those are very minor things to get frustrated over but just think how poor Moses and Aaron must have felt over their dealings with Pharaoh.

They have delivered God's message to Pharaoh but on every occasion Pharaoh has refused to listen or to let the Israelites obey God. As a result God has sent his first plague in judgment upon Egypt but still Pharaoh refused to let the people go. With each plague God is showing his grace and mercy to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians He is giving them an opportunity to repent and to turn to God.

The first plague lasted 7 days (7:25) and even the duration of the plagues were a demonstration of God's grace to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Sometimes in God's grace to us He disciplines us because of our refusal to obey his word but his discipline is never too severe nor does it last for so long that there is no way back for us. God does not delight in grinding us or his enemies into the ground, he simply wants us to obey and repent of whatever it is that causes us to disobey his word. God is not like human beings he is patient with us he never seems to tire of calling sinners to repentance he never seems to get frustrated by our refusal to obey his word (2 Peter 3:9).

Having set the scene let us look at the next three plagues and at Pharaoh's continual response to God's word.

1. THE PLAGUE OF FROGS (vs. 1-15).

Once again Moses is instructed to go to Pharaoh and to deliver God's word (v 1). This time a severe warning from God is attached, it is a warning of what will happen if Pharaoh continues to refuse to listen and heed God's message (v 2-4). Although when the Nile was turned into blood it probably did not affect Pharaoh as much as the people for he would have had ample supply of fruit juices and wines to drink.

This time the frogs will affect him personally, they will be everywhere even in Pharaoh's bed and they will jump all over him and the rest of the people. Although the text does not say how Pharaoh responded to such a severe warning it is clear that he did not listen for Aaron is commanded to stretch out his hand over the waters of Egypt and as a result frogs came up on the land of Pharaoh.

Why did God choose to send frogs this time? Well once again what is going on has to do with the whole question of who is God who is sovereign who is in control. The Egyptians regarded frogs as a symbol of divine power and a representation of fruitfulness. One of the major goddesses of Egypt was Hekhet or Hegget who is depicted in their drawings as a human female with a frog's head. One of the tasks of this god was to control the multiplication of frogs and it is said to have done this by protecting the frog eating crocodiles of the time.

So by sending this plague God is declaring that your god Hekhet is powerless she cannot resist the one true God. Because the frogs were everywhere the Egyptians would not have been able to stop standing on the frogs. They would have been mortified at this because in their eyes they were standing on a representation of one of their goddesses and as a result they would have been

afraid that doing so would upset their god and perhaps their fruitfulness in the land would be diminished as a consequence of their actions.

Let me pause and try to apply this to us today. I think there is a lesson concerning our need to warn people of the consequences of our failure to heed and obey God's word. Gospel preaching must be balanced it must talk about sin, it must talk about God's love for sinners, It must talk about Christ work of atonement, it must call for repentance and faith but it must also include the subject of God's judgement for our failure to listen and respond to the gospel.

Some evangelical churches are dumbing down the gospel; the balance is not being maintained. We love to talk about the love and mercy of God but the love and mercy of God is being robbed of its full impact unless we declare God's wrath on sin and his judgement in hell of those who reject his word. We are often afraid of how people will react if we talk about hell, and of course we have to do so in a very natural way rather than a forced way but we must include hell in our vocabulary.

God's message to Pharaoh carries this warning of judgement so that if Pharaoh fails to listen and respond then he is fully aware of the consequences. If you have not responded to God's message of grace to you then you need to be clear about this. Continual refusal to admit you are a sinner or a refusal to repent of that sin and turn to God for forgiveness in Jesus Christ then the consequences of your action is hell.

Let me make clear what I mean by that term because even hell is being downgraded today. Hell is a place of conscious punishment, which lasts for all eternity. It is a place that God sends sinners who refuse to repent of sin a place where God's justice is done. Christian we do not need to feel embarrassed about hell, it is clearly taught in God's word and is part of the good news of the gospel. True and genuine repentance means that God saves us from hell and that is clearly good news.

So let's be clear in presenting the gospel and let's be clear what it means for you this morning if you reject God's message of salvation.

As with the first plague the Egyptian magicians also managed to produce frogs using their secret arts and the power of Satan (v 7). But again they could not reverse the situation so instead of helping the poor Egyptian people they actually made the situation worse. That is what Satan always does; he will always make people's situations worse even though he might deceive them into thinking that their situation will be better.

At this point Pharaoh has had enough so for the first time he summons Moses and Aaron into his presence. He asks them to pray to the Lord so that the frogs will be taken away. Here Pharaoh for the first time recognises that the Israelite God has power to take the frogs' away (v 8). Pharaoh promised that he would let the people go if God did remove the plague of frogs. In order to show that Jehovah is truly God, Moses asks Pharaoh when he would like rid of the frogs (v 9). Immediately Pharaoh says "tomorrow." Moses agreed with Pharaoh's request and again the whole reason behind it is to show that there is no god like the one true God. Moses prayed as agreed and God answered, the frogs died and the land reeked of them.

Moses kept his word and prayed, God had honoured his prayer by answering but now the question is will Pharaoh keep his? The answer is No! (v 15). He hardened his heart when he saw that life was back to normal. This shows what Pharaoh was really like and it shows that he was not genuinely interested in submitting to the Lord when he asked Moses to pray he simply wanted ease of his circumstances.

This raises a point of application for us concerning how we can often bargain with God. Have you ever asked God to do something and if he does answer our prayer we promise that we will do such and such. It's really bargaining with God isn't it? But the amazing thing is that so often God does answer our prayer in those situations but then the crunch comes and we have to keep our

part of the agreement. Do we do so? So often we have to confess that we don't and that is just because in our hearts all we really wanted was God to answer our prayer so that our situation and circumstances of life could be easier or more enjoyable. Well if that is the case we need to be careful for God sends another plague upon Pharaoh and the Lord might just turn your circumstances once again. Although we can be guilty of dealing with the Lord like this, this response is much more common in the hearts of unbelievers.

There are times when in crises unbelievers pray to God or ask us to pray for them. But what is it that they really want. In their desperation they might promise to come to church if the Lord answers or read the bible or something else but if the Lord does answer their prayer very, very rarely do they ever keep their promise. Why is that? Because they are not interested in the Lord at all they just know that they cannot change their own circumstances and they hope that the Lord will.

They might not even think he can do something for them, but they will often try to persuade him to do something for them by making idle promises. They don't keep their promises because all they are concerned about is a change of circumstances and not a change of heart. If that is you then you need to be very careful that you do not play fast and loose with God; if you know the rest of the story in Exodus you will know that God ultimately wins. God will not allow us to play games with him or try to manipulate him, he might answer our prayers and he might change our circumstances for the better but he does so out of his grace and out of his mercy to us. He does so to give you more time to repent and turn to him for salvation.

2. THE PLAGUE OF GNATS (vs. 16-19).

We are not told the interval between one plague and the next one but with this plague Aaron is instructed to stretch out his staff and strike the dust of the ground (v 16). When he did this the dust of the ground became gnats or vermin, lice or maggots or mosquitoes. Now this plague was probably an attack on the priests in Egypt who we know were obsessed with ritual cleanliness. They use to shave their heads every three days for fear of harbouring anything unclean while going about their religious duties.

It would be impossible to be ritually clean with millions and millions of gnats around. The Egyptian magicians tried to copy this miracle but failed (v 18). They have to confess that this is the finger of God but they are not recognising the God of the Israelites here they are saying some greater power than ours is at work here. When relief from this plague came, Pharaoh as on previous occasions hardened his heart and would not listen. The lesson is that God is all powerful more powerful than all the evil powers being used by the Egyptian Magicians. This is confirmed for us in the New Testament with numerous exorcisms being carried out by Jesus. In Mark 5:1-20 we have a man who is under the control of a legion of evil spirits. Look at the power of this spirit (v 3-4). The man could not be controlled by anyone he was a danger to himself (v 5) and to others.

Yet on seeing Jesus the evil spirit begged Jesus to send him into a herd of pigs; Jesus did so. Note the power of the evil spirits over the pigs (v 13). That is the difference between God's power and the power of Satan. Satan's power is limited and can only work within the limits set for him by God. But God's power is unlimited he can do whatever he wants and no one and nothing can stop him. This is why conversion is possible. The bible teaches that we are following the ways of the devil (Ephesians 2:2-3) that our minds are blinded by him (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Therefore we are not as free as we think we are. We are held in the power of the evil one. We cannot escape, in fact we don't want to escape for we do not realise just how powerless we are or how much influence Satan has over us. But in conversion the almighty God comes into our lives and breaks the power of Satan and sin over our lives and truly sets us free to follow and serve the Lord Jesus as our Lord and Master. That's what we must pray for in our day that we might see

more of God's power at work not in doing miracles as some churches want but in doing the miracle of the new birth in the hearts of sinners. Can God do such a miracle? Yes He can for He is almighty God, nothing is too hard for him, and the hardest heart can be cracked by God and set free from the grip and power of sin and Satan. That is what we must pray for and look for in our day.

Do not lose confidence in our God or in his power, the Israelites were many years in slavery before they saw God work in power, so we must not lose faith but keep praying and crying unto God to come to our community in power and save sinners, set them free and bring great glory to his name.

3. THE PLAGUE OF FLIES (vs. 20-32).

The procedure is similar with this plague; Moses goes to Pharaoh with his command (v 20). Again God's message carries another warning of the consequences if he refused to listen and obey (v 21). But this time there will be a distinction made between the Israelites and the Egyptians (v 22-23). The purpose behind this is that Pharaoh may realise that Jehovah is not just the God of the Israelites but that he is actually present with them in the land and that he is in the whole land of Egypt.

As God he could send plagues on whomever he wanted and withhold them from whom he wanted to. The plague of flies will make it clear who is sending the plague and why. This is teaching the principle of election that out of God's mercy he is gracious to these Hebrew people by shielding them from this particular plague. The phrase "I will make a distinction" literally means, "I will set a redemption." The meaning seems to be that the Lord will deliver his people from the plague and hand the Egyptians over to it.

To hammer home his point of who is sovereign God even tells Pharaoh when he will do it (v 23). God keeps his word and sends the plague of flies and the conclusion of the plague is that the land was being ruined by the flies (v 24).

God's principle of election still exists today. He chooses out of his love and mercy to rescue certain people from the judgement and wrath of almighty God. He does this through Jesus his son who he sent to be the Saviour. Jesus died in order that all those chosen by God (Ephesians 1:4) might have the penalty of sin removed through the shedding of the blood of Jesus. It is those people that in time experience God's power in conversion.

The rest God simply leaves and hands over to his own judgement because of their hard hearts and stubborn wills. God's election should never make us proud, he did not chose us because we are any better than anyone else he chose us for the same reason that he chose Israel (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). He chose us because he loved us. But why did he love us? Again it was not because we were lovely or loveable but he loved us because he loved us. That is the bible's answer to that question. So our response, Christian friend, ought to one of praise and wonder that God should chose to save us.

It should be one of immense gratitude to him for his salvation and as a result we ought to love him with all our heart soul mind and strength. If we do that then that will be reflected in our service and commitment to him. Of course the elect of God are saved from God's ultimate judgement of hell. This is not because we do not deserve it for we do but because of the mercy of God in choosing us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

We have nothing to boast about except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. You might ask how do I know if I am one of God's elect. Let me ask you have you repented of your sin and, in, faith trusted

in Christ; if not then why not? Do that today and God will enable you to do so by his grace and then you too can and will enjoy the privileges of being one of God' people.

I don't have time now to expound the remainder of this chapter but you will notice that Pharaoh compromises but God will not compromise. God does not work like that. Either you obey God totally or you disobey. God speaks and demands our obedience; we simply must obey without question or dispute. To fail to do so is to disobey.

So you can't repent just a little and somehow think God will meet you half way. We must repent of all our sins otherwise it is not true repentance. We can't be half committed to God and think that God will be pleased, after all look what we are doing for him. A half committed Christian is a disobedient Christian.

So as I finish let us who are Christians give our all to our God for he has chosen us and saved us from his judgement in hell. If we are not yet true believers then today if you hear his voice do not harden your heart like Pharaoh did, obey him in repentance and faith and know the experience of conversion. He is all-powerful he can free you from sin and Satan; will you turn to him for this?

Amen