**The Gospel According to Moses**

**A Divine Distinction**

**Exodus 8:20-9:12**

June 13, 2021

David Taylor

We are working our way through the Old Testament book of Exodus in our current sermon series, The Gospel According to Moses. Today we look at 8:20-9:12, as we consider the second cycle of three plagues, swarming flies, dying livestock, and crippling boils. Remember that the first nine plagues run in cycles of three and culminate with the tenth plague, the death of first born in Egypt. Each cycle starts with Moses and Aron confronting Pharoah early in the morning. Then they go into Pharaoh, into his court. And the third plague comes with no warning. My big idea is through the plagues/Exodus God Reveals himself, redeems his people, and brings retribution to his enemies.

**God Reveals Himself Through the Plagues**

The Lord tells Moses to rise early and to present himself or take a stand against Pharaoh while he is on his way to the Nile, and demand that he let God’s people go (20). Conflict is never easy, especially with those who are hostile to faith. God called Moses to stand against Pharoah though it was not going to go well, and it was only going to get worse. Where is God calling you to take a stand where it will be hard? God calls Moses to confront Pharaoh because he was opposing God’s purposes for Israel. God created humanity to fill the earth with his glory, that is, fill the earth with the knowledge of God but sin disrupted this. So God revealed himself to Abraham and made a covenant with him. God promised to bless Abraham so he would become a great nation and his offspring would be as numerous as the sand of the sea. By the time of the Exodus, God has fulfilled that promise, making Israel into a large nation. Threatened by their size, Pharoah enslaved Israel. So God chose Moses to deliver Israel so God could fulfill his purposes through them. If Pharoah will not let Israel go, God will send plagues until he does.

This second cycle of plagues start with God sending swarming flies over everything with no place to escape them. The swarms are so bad that Egypt is described as ruined (8:24). When Pharoah does not repent, the Lord instructs Moses to go into Pharaoh’s court to warn him again, let God’s people go or else the Lord will send a severe plague upon Egypt’s livestock but not on Israel’s livestock because God is making make a distinction between their livestock (9:1-6). This is a national disaster. Livestock represents Egypt’s wealth, a source of food like milk and cheese, production as work animals, and Egypt’s religious life as objects of worship. Yet Pharoah’s heart was still hardened (9:7) so at God’s instruction, Moses throws a handful of soot into the air in front of Pharoah. It becomes a fine dust that causes boils to break out on man and all kinds of livestock throughout Egypt (9:8-10). The boils are not just a skin irritation but the result of some type of infection or virus so debilitating that the magician/priests could not even stand before Moses and still, Pharoah hardened his heart again (9:11-12). God continues to humiliate the Egyptian gods so that Egypt, Israel, and the nations would know that he is the Lord (8:22). God reveals himself through the plagues, and secondly God redeems his people through the plagues.

**God Redeems His People Through the Plagues**

The Lord demands that Pharoah let his people go so that they can serve him (20). The goal of redemption is not just freedom from slavery but freedom to serve or worship God. We see this described more fully in Exodus 19:4-6, “*You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* I am reading Deuteronomy in my devotional reading. This week I noticed that obedience is described as walking in the way of the Lord. It is the Old Testament picture of discipleship, following the teaching or commands of God (Deut 5:32-33). God redeemed Israel so they would honor him life with a life of faith, described by the apostle Paul as the obedience of faith (Rom 1:5). God redeemed us from slavery to sin so we would be slaves to righteousness, live obediently to him.

In redeeming Israel, God made a distinction between the land of Egypt and the land of Goshen (8:22), between Pharoah’s people and the Lord’s people (8:23), between Egypt’s livestock and Israel’s livestock (9:4). There would be no plagues in Goshen - no flies, no dead livestock, and no boils. Jewish families are enjoying their meals with open windows and a nice breeze flowing through. They are still milking their cows and making cheese and plowing their fields. They walk and work and play while a few miles away the Egyptian families are swatting away flies as they try to cook their meals because flies are in the dough, in their water, and buzzing around their heads. Their livestock are dying and rotting in their fields, they no longer have the ability to plow their fields, transport supplies, or travel from place to place except on foot. And they are crippled by the pain of their boils.

How many problems have you avoided, disasters you have side stepped, or decisions you made that only by the Lord's provision you escaped danger and ruin because you belong to God. Not because you’re a hard worker, resourceful, smart, talented, have lots of friends in the community, or your parents have money. The Egyptians had all those and yet they got flies in their coffee, their animals died, and they were sick. Take comfort in knowing that we are his people. God reveals himself through the plagues, God redeems his people through the plagues, and God brings retribution through the plagues.

**God Brings Retribution Through the Plagues**

The distinction we see in the Exodus is mercy toward God’s people and judgment toward his enemies. While the plagues bring devastation and death on Egypt, Israel is spared. Now it does not always happen that way, the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous alike (Mat 5:45) but here God is making a distinction, redemption for his people and retribution for his enemies. God doesn't look down on all humanity as one group of people - he sees his people, his Bride, and his children, and then he sees all others. Sometimes people will say I don’t believe in a God who treats people differently but what parent would not treat their children differently than other children?

Retribution is only because Pharaoh will not repent. Even as his people suffer, he wants to negotiate the terms of Israel’s release as if God’s commands are just suggestions. Do you struggle with God over something that he clearly commands? As if honesty with your employer or your parents is optional. As if giving and being generous toward others is unnecessary because you have so many ~~needs~~, wants. Bartering or negotiating with God never ends well. Every time God extended mercy, Pharoah hardened his heart. Signs and wonders both soften and harden hearts. The gospel message both softens and hardens hearts. You see it in the life of Israel, and you see it in Jesus’ ministry. There was no escaping the plagues for Pharoah and there will be no escape for anyone who hardens their hearts against God, the only good and benevolent God and king. God gave Pharaoh so many opportunities to repent until he ran dry on mercy and drank God’s retribution.

God went to great lengths to reveal himself in the Exodus, he went to great lengths to redeem Israel, and he went to great length to extend mercy until Pharoah faced God’s retribution. God still goes to great lengths to reveal himself, to redeem a people to serve him, and to judge those who refuse him in the gospel. That is the message of the Exodus and the message of the Lord’s supper.

Life Group Questions:

1. Summarize the big idea of Exodus 8:20-9:12 in your own words.
2. Wht does it mean that God is making himself known to Egypt? to Israel? To the nations?
3. Why would Pharoah plead with Moses to ask God to remove the plagues only to harden his heart again?
4. What is the difference between regret, being sorry, and true repentance?
5. What does this passage tell us God’s mission?
6. How is Gods original purpose in creation connected to Gods purpose in mission?
7. What does this teach us about God, humanity, us?
8. What does this teach us about following Jesus in discipleship?
9. How is God asking you to respond to this passage?