

THE CHURCH AT OAKWOOD

God's Purpose, Judgment and Provision

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So let me ask you a question? "How far would you be willing to go to secure the freedom of someone that you love?"

When your love is set on someone, you have entered into a relationship in which you are deeply concerned with the mind, will and emotions of that individual. Your intense concern is not driven by some sense of misplaced power to abuse or control. Your concern-rooted in love-produces acts of righteousness that are meant to display to your loved one and those that mean your loved one harm, that you are intent to make yourself and your love known. It is a love that is transformative at the deepest level of who you are.

The last few Sundays we have taught on the plagues sent by God through Moses. These plagues serve the grand scheme of God to bring about the deliverance of the Israelite people from Egypt for the purposes of prophetic fulfillment, redemption and worship.

These plagues serve a threefold purpose of deliverance, proclamation and judgment.

These plagues will serve as a means of deliverance for the people of God.

"But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go." (Ex 3:19-20)

These plagues are a means for the proclamation of the name of YHWH,

"Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD; behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile and it shall turn into blood." (Ex 7:17)

"But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarm of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth." (Ex 8:22)

These plagues are a means for the judgment of a nation-Egypt-that is idolatrous and the carries out that idolatry through the oppression of the Israelite people.

"Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness." But so far, you have not obeyed." (Ex 7:16)

In Exodus 9:13-10:29, we read about a third set of plagues sent by God. These plagues are the "signs and power and wonder" of God meant to carry out deliverance, proclamation and judgment. Unlike the first

and second groupings of plagues-(water to blood, frogs, gnats), (flies, livestock, boils)-these three plagues of hail, locusts and darkness are all characterized by “death.” The hail strikes down man, beast and crops. The locusts devour all the crops. The darkness shrouds the conversation of Pharaoh and Moses which is about the threat of death.

These plagues are pointing us somewhere. This last grouping of plagues is leading us to one final plague that will be known for death and deliverance. It will be an event that can only be described as the full weight of YHWH’s might being placed upon heart of Pharaoh and Egypt

The Exodus story is giving us hints that there is an event coming which will leave a profound impression on Pharaoh, Egypt and the Israelite people. It is an event that proclaims YHWH has an intense and profound love for the Israelites. It will lead us to an event that is fulfilled in bloody cross and triumphant resurrection.

So let’s get to work.

There are multiple themes in the plagues that we can observe but I want to focus on three today. What I want us to keep in mind is my opening question, *“How far would you be willing to go to secure the freedom of someone that you love?”*

The three themes we will look at are-*purpose, judgment and provision.*

First, God acts with **purpose** and therefore his activity is neither indiscriminate nor careless.

Second, the love of God for his people is the fountain and power that compels him to act with **judgment** upon those who would cause harm to his people.

Lastly, God’s **provision** of a new heart gives men and women the new capacity- of being, will and emotion-to produce repentance that proves God’s resurrecting work.

God acts with purpose and therefore his activity is neither indiscriminate nor careless.

This first theme I will not spend much time on. It is evident from the outset of this historical narrative that God-YHWH-is intent on accomplishing very specific goals for the glory of his name. God is not making this up as he goes. Additionally, YHWH is not on the defense, reacting to the responses of Pharaoh or being caught off guard and unaware of Pharaoh’s responses.

In our text today we see that YHWH acts with purpose to accomplish four specific goals. In verse 14 of chapter nine, YHWH states that the “full force” of the plagues will be sent, *“so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.”*

God is incomparable. He cannot be compared to the sun, moon, stars or wind. We may try to convey the might of God, the glory of God and love of God in ways that humans can grasp. But there is none like

him in all the earth. He is the all knowing, all sufficient, all powerful, all loving God of Heaven and Earth. *"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."*(Rom 11:36)

The second and third goals we read is in verse sixteen. Rulers, presidents, mayors, police chiefs, elders, your boss at work do not hold their positions simply because of their own intelligence, personality or because they know somebody. They are ordained or they have been appointed to their position for a purpose. YHWH tells Pharaoh that he has been appointed for the purpose of seeing the power of God and be used to proclaim God. No more will Pharaoh be able to say what he spoke to Moses in Exodus 5:2, "Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?"

He has been raised up as king of Egypt to see the power of God in great signs and wonders and it will be uttered off the lips of many throughout the earth, "the God of the Hebrews visited Egypt. YHWH is the power over the earth."

The final goal is in Exodus 10:1-2 and it is a goal that will be generational. The signs and wonders will be done so that the name of God will be spoken to the second and third generations of Moses.

"that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD." (Exodus 10:2)

Your being here today is for a purpose. When so many people wander through life searching for the "meaning of life," "what am I suppose to do with my life," or "why am I here?" The clearest answer that can be given to you is that your life has the greatest purpose of seeing the power of God, knowing God and proclaiming God today and throughout multiple generations. The sum total of all your experiences, your emotions, your coming to God or your refusal to obey God are by design and carefully crafted by God who will have you see his power, know his name and have his name resound like the screamed echo in a valley.

So YHWH acts with purpose and therefore his activity is neither indiscriminate nor careless.

Second, the love of God for his people is the power that compels him to act with judgment upon those who would cause harm to his people.

If you take a general reading of the curses, plagues and judgments that are found in Scripture, you can arrive at some common characteristics of confusion, frustration, defeat and death. The emotions, human will and total being of a person or persons is overrun with madness and blindness. You are driven to insanity as others take joy in your wives, daughters and the work of your hands.

Ladies and gentleman, the curses, plagues and judgments that we read about here in Exodus and throughout Scripture are God's intentional and purposed responses to men and nations who do not fear this glorious and awesome name. These curses, plagues and judgments-frogs, flies, hail, locust,

darkness-are God's carefully chosen instruments to show men and nations that he is holy and his name will not be refused.

How do we reconcile the overwhelming destruction brought about by God upon Egypt as we go about speaking of this same God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ? We need to understand that all Egypt has been affected. The hail and locust came-food is no longer available to the men, women and children of Egypt. Their economy, their way to make money has been destroyed. How do we reconcile these events with this God who is love and in who is no darkness at all?

Have you heard something like this or even wrestled with it yourself?

"I can't believe in a God who would destroy whole nations of innocent people because they don't worship him and don't shape their lives around him."

You are being dishonest when you assert God is not love when he must act with terrible power to free his people and then at the same time you celebrate humans who must act in similar ways to defend their loved ones. In this objection there is this thought that God is to be judged by a standard established by man.

If you are in some type of daily reading plan or seeking to read the Bible in a year, you will find yourself reading these types of passages:

*"Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Jahaz. And the LORD our God gave him over to us, and we defeated him and his sons and all his people. And we captured all his cities at that time and devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children. We left no survivors."
(Deuteronomy 2:32-34)*

*"All these were cities fortified with high walls, gates, and bars, besides very many unwalled villages. And we devoted them to destruction, as we did to Sihon the king of Heshbon, devoting to destruction every city, men, women, and children. But all the livestock and the spoil of the cities we took as our plunder. So we took the land at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from the Valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon."
(Deuteronomy 3:5-8)*

After the Exodus, as they enter the Promised Land, God instructs the Israelites to deal with specific cities in certain ways. You can read in Deut 20:16-18 that those cities far from Canaan were to be dealt in one manner if they refused peace. Those cities of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites and all mentioned in Genesis 15, everyone and thing was to be judged. Why?

*"that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God."
(Deuteronomy 20:18)*

What are the purposes of these plagues of hail, locust and darkness that are characterized by death and judgment? We have to do the hard work of understanding God's distinct love for his people and the sin of Pharaoh and all of those who refuse the name of YHWH.

God's love has been set upon a people that he has chosen before the foundations of the world to be the nation by which Jesus Christ-God in the flesh- would one day emerge to announce the kingdom of God. These Israelites have suffered under the oppressive hand of Pharaoh and now the love of God is compelling him to act with purpose and judgment.

Becky Pippert who wrote *Hope Has Its Reasons* addresses in her fourth chapter, "What Kind of God Get's Angry?" wrote:

"Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with...tolerance as we might towards strangers? Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference...God's wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer...which is eating out the insides [of those he loves] with his whole being."

The love of God for his people compels him to act with justice upon those who would cause his people harm. The Israelites have been ravaged by the unwise actions of the Egyptian rulers. If God had not acted he would be unloving and indifferent. He sets a distinction between his people and those that would do them harm (Exodus 9:26; 10:23) and he also brings a devastation that declares to those who bring harm that his love and name will triumph over every power and principality.

But more than that!

The Gospel makes the startling claim that God physically, emotionally and spiritually experienced the brutality of his own judgment and wrath. God is not indifferent but he loved by acting on our behalf. When God could have brought the full weight of his hand down on humanity, he powerfully judges his son Jesus Christ. His settled opposition to the sin that runs like a cancer through humanity was literally addressed by his whole eternal and fleshly being.

This is an answer to how we the people who have been redeemed by the resurrected and very present Christ love him with all our emotion, being and will.

The final theme I want us to see is God's provision of a new heart gives men and women the new capacity- of being, will and emotion-to produce repentance that proves God's resurrecting work.

In Exodus 9:14, God states that "I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people."

Jewish culture understood the "heart" to be the seat of the emotions, being and will. God is literally telling Pharaoh that all of these judgments and its effects will strike at the very being of Pharaoh and by extension the nation. What can we learn about the emotions, being and will of Pharaoh?

Pharaoh sought to manipulate the situation with a worldly type of sorrow in 9:27-28 and 10:8-11. His worldly sorrow is indicated by his confession of sin yet refusal to let the people go. His worldly sorrow

was only an indication that his heart was still hard. His emotion, being and will were not able to obey the message of God and love his neighbor.

Second we can learn that Pharaoh's hard heart also produced irrational behavior. In Exodus 10:7-11 those closest to Pharaoh see the writing on the wall, "Are you not aware Egypt is lost?!" "Don't you see what is happening to the world around you as you refuse to obey this message?!" "Don't you understand that yours and our life is in ruin?!" His behavior is irrational because he has observed the plagues, he has seen the results and yet he still refuses.

Pharaoh's emotion, his being and his will is producing a manipulative and irrational behavior which leads him to seek bargains, compromise and issue death threats.

I wonder if you are like Pharaoh. Is your affection for whatever you are trying to build with your own hands at the expense of others blinding you to the fact your life is in ruins? Do you sincerely believe that you can hide behind your little human power, your hustle and manipulation; thinking you can stay one step ahead of YHWH? Pharaoh was bent on holding onto power and prestige at the expense of slaves, his own people and as we shall read his own son. God is intent to shake the very person of Pharaoh. His emotions, his being and his will; crushed by the weight and power of God.

Since it is true that God hardens the emotions, the being and will of a person, it is equally true that God is able to give new emotions, a new being and a new will to enable us to repent, to live and to enjoy him.

In Ezekiel 36:24-27, God promises,

"I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."(Ezekiel 36:24-27)

I hope you hear the Exodus language in this passage. God is going to gather men and women out of darkness and bring them into their own land. There they will have "a new heart." Here in this new land in which Christ is King and the Spirit of God dwells in you, you possess new emotions, a new being and a new will.

God purposes to provide new hearts that have a godly grief over sin which produces a repentance that is in keeping with a resurrected heart-emotion, being and will- that enjoys God. God provides his people with the ability to repent that displays a deep love for the name of God and a deep desire to love ones brother and sister in Christ.

No longer do we reside in the darkness that is so heavy it can be felt but we reside in the light of God that is a reminder we are a distinct people because of God's purposed love on us.

So let me ask you a question? “How far would you be willing to go to secure the freedom of someone that you love?” YHWH goes so far as to pour out divine wrath on his son. He pours out his plagues on Christ in order to secure a sinful people to live holy in the presence of this same Christ who is resurrected and present with us today.

Miroslav Volf stated once,

“Divine wrath isn’t about punishing, but about censuring wrongdoing, restoring the wronged and transforming the wrong doer.”

The Gospel is so transformative because...

God acts with **purpose** and therefore his activity is neither indiscriminate nor careless.

The love of God for his people is the fountain and power that compels him to act with **judgment** upon those who would cause harm to his people.

God’s **provision** of a new heart gives men and women the new capacity- of being, will and emotion-to produce repentance that proves God’s resurrecting work.

Let us pray.

¹ Rebecca Pippert, *Hope Has Its Reasons* (Harper, 1990), Chapter 4, “What Kind of God Gets Angry?”