

Judgement and Mercy

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[0 : 00] May God add his blessing to that reading from his holy word as we see in that passage we read in Exodus 7 and indeed in the verses at the start of chapter 10, the theme of judgment and mercy.

And as we consider that theme to look at three aspects of that theme, the reason for the plagues, why did God send these plagues?

And then the response to the plagues, particularly the response of Pharaoh to the plagues. And then thirdly, the result of these plagues, particularly in relation to the Israelites.

Judgment and mercy. I suppose that judgment wouldn't be at the top of most people's list when they want a suitable topic to reflect on and to consider and to come before God and worship.

But then to ignore judgment, to ignore the judgment of God against sin, if we do that, then we're simply creating a false God and reading a false Bible and having a false faith and having a false view of salvation.

[1 : 25] Because God as judge has to be proclaimed. The return of Jesus to judge the world, that has to be proclaimed. And even in the present context that we're living in, in the current situation regarding our ongoing pandemic, we do have to recognize that God is speaking to us in judgment.

We've been given a particular call to come before God in prayer and to recognize the voice of God speaking to us through these times.

Even in the dark providence that God has permitted to give us. So that indeed we're given that spirit of repentance. And so when we come to consider the instances of the plagues here, this morning certainly the first nine plagues, then we do have to see the hand of God in judgment.

Judgment against all who'd resist his word. Judgment against those who resist God's church, God's people, who resist God himself and resist his son, the Lord Jesus.

And Pharaoh had to be taught that God is Lord, that God is no false God in whom the Israelite people were to put their faith in, that their faith wasn't a false faith.

[2 : 51] And bring this even to ourselves, that we proclaim in our land, across the nation, in our world, that the God whom we worship isn't a false God.

He is true. His word is true. His word is truth. And those who are his, you who are his, you follow, not a false saviour, but a true saviour.

You follow the one who is the way, the truth, and the life. And we have to say too, at the same time, that all like Pharaoh who reject the Lord, there will be judgment.

And so when we think of the matter of judgment here before us, we have to remember this also at the same time. We have to recognize mercy in judgment.

God's judgments are given to reveal the glory of God. Yes, they're given to punish wrongdoers, but they're also given, also sent, to bring God's people back to himself, to shake us out of our spiritual lethargy.

[4 : 04] God will send judgment. But in order to revive his church, revive his people, to bring his people back to himself. And when we see even in the purposes of the plagues here in Egypt, plagues that were sent, yes, to reveal God and his power over Pharaoh.

At the same time, we have to see plagues, the purpose of their speaking to the Israelites to show forth the God of power, the God of glory, the God who's with his people, the God who is over all in power and in mercy.

And so that theme of judgment and mercy, well, we'll see the first nine plagues that God permitted to come before Egypt.

God willing, in a fortnight's time, we'll think of the tenth plague. But this morning, to think of the first nine plagues, we might say as a whole, and think first of all then of the reason for the plagues.

God always has a purpose in his actions. And the purpose of God's actions is his glory.

[5 : 21] Whether it's an act of mercy or act of judgment, whether it's an act of grace or act of discipline, God will carry out what God does to demonstrate who he is in his glory, in his holiness.

And if we ever trifle with God's holiness, well, God will discipline us. If a nation refuses to obey God, God will cause judgment to come upon that land.

Because we can't disregard God's glory. And if we disregard God's glory, if we disregard who God is in his glory, in his majesty, in his holiness, if we're living like practical atheists, well, we'll be denying God's presence and power.

And God will act to remind us who he is and bring us to see the reality of his power, of his might, so that we might turn from our evil ways and return to our Lord, our God, our King.

As we see God's judgment given in mercy. And it's that mercy, God's mercy seen, yes, in those who are being disciplined, but disciplined in God's love to restore you to himself.

[6 : 43] But for those who don't love God, whose hearts are hardened to the one true God, we say with the authority of Scripture, that God will visit in judgment.

Just as we see here in the account of the plagues upon Egypt. And certainly in terms of our focus, we're going to concentrate specifically on the first plague, the plague of blood, but bear in mind, of course, the other plagues.

As we're saying to the children, the plagues of frogs and gnats and flies and livestock death, the boils, the hail, the locusts, the darkness.

And then as I said in the fortnight's time, God willing, the greatest darkness of all, the plague of death. But remember this. If you believe in the sovereign control of God, then we have to believe in the sovereign purposes of God in sending these plagues.

We have to believe that in the sovereign control of God, even as we see that in the opening words to the plagues, words that accompanied each plague, the Lord said, the Lord said, the Lord said to Moses.

[7 : 59] You see, before each plague happened, God spoke. God spoke to indicate his sovereign power, his sovereign purposes. He spoke to indicate that the judgment he was giving upon Egypt, that judgment was sourced in himself.

In other words, each plague was by the initiative of God. It wasn't Moses' initiative. It wasn't Aaron's initiative. It was God's. Moses and Aaron are there as God's intermediaries.

They're God's spokesmen. And they're mediating God's purposes. But of course, it was only in obedience to God's word that Moses and Aaron did what God wanted them to do.

And so there they are waiting in God's word, not doing anything until God speaks to them. And then, so when we consider the reasons for the plagues, then we have to realize this is God's leading.

This is God's initiative. God's power and God's right to inflict judgment on any who challenges authority. So the first reason then for the plagues has to be seen in God's power, God's power over Pharaoh and over Egypt.

[9 : 19] Every announcement of each plague, yes, has a such refrain, this is what God says, God spoke or thus says the Lord.

But it's also accompanied with reference to Pharaoh. The words, go to Pharaoh, or present yourself to Pharaoh, or acts to be done in the sight of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's mentioned in every one of these plagues. Because it's Pharaoh who has to see and to realize that everything happening in these plagues is a miraculous intervention of God.

He's going to see that God is Lord. He's going to see that the Lord God of Israel is no lesser God, isn't less than any of the gods of Egypt.

And Pharaoh's going to see by a succession of plagues that God means business. And however much Pharaoh's magicians try to copy the plagues, eventually they're going to fail.

[10 : 24] And it's going to become clear that God is Lord, that God's the one true God. And no power on earth can prevail against him. And so, even when we consider the judgment of God, even in our present circumstances, our present application, then we do have to be prepared to accept that God's purposes must prevail.

Even when he is permitting a 21st century plague that so covered the earth, well, we do have to pay attention to what God is saying to us through this. To realize this, that in the fragility of life, God is sovereign.

And to realize that man isn't supreme. Man is vulnerable. Man isn't at the center of the universe. It's God. Man isn't at the apex, the height of existence.

It's God. Science doesn't hold the answers. But God has. God does. And we see that in his word. And so, it's for the Lord's people, for me, for you, for each one of us, to really to wake up and to realize that this present-day judgment of God must bring you to your knees in repentance.

God's been merciful in permitting what's even happened in this past year. You have to say that in wrath, he's remembered mercy. So ask yourself this.

[12:00] How much have you even given thanks to God, even in this past year, that the Lord has brought upon us so that we might be even the stronger in fellowship, so that you might be even the more eager to worship God, and yes, to be the more concerned to tell others the good news of the Lord Jesus.

And yes, how thankful we are that God has blessed us even with the means that he's given us to come together and worship, such as we're doing this morning. Yes, of course, we long for the day when the Lord's people are physically present together again in worship.

That is, if you like, the default position in our coming before God as a congregation, as a people of God. But we have to say this, even in these days of physical distancing one from another, God has given us this time to repent and to return to him and to wait expectantly on him.

God's judgment has brought mercy to the weak. God's judgment has brought mercy to so many of us in our backsliding.

He's brought mercy even to the reluctant follower. And so, yes, we continue to cry out to God, Lord, in wrath, remember mercy. Lord, you who spared your one and only Son, you who visited judgment on your beloved Son, so that mercy be given to those when you call to yourself, Lord, teach us, teach us in judgment for mercy's sake.

[13:48] But then secondly, we see the response to the plague, certainly the response of Pharaoh to the plagues. think of even in general terms responding to God's judgment or about yourself.

What is your response to God's judgment? Well, let's look first of all at Pharaoh's response and the response of the magicians to the plagues. Well, the very first plague, as we read there in chapter 7, Pharaoh sees what he dreads.

He sees the river, the river that the Pharaoh's held sacred, the river turns to blood. And it's done by the actions of Aaron when God has commanded Aaron to place his staff over the river and blood, blood appears.

Blood in the first plague, we might say, as a prelude to the last plague when blood is going to be seen but not as a curse but as a blessing to the Israelites.

But see the devastation of judgment in that first plague. The rivers turn to blood and the Egyptian economy is going to be disrupted. Lives are going to be altered.

[15:01] And what was considered sacred is now polluted by the permission of God. We might even say this, that even what we're seeing there in that first plague is a picture of our current pandemic, the devastation that that's brought in the world's economies, the devastation to the way of life of so many of us, things that were considered sacred and certainly sacred and secular thought, they seem to be of little worth.

But will the world respond in repentance? Will people turn to God and turn from sin? We'll look at Pharaoh's response.

He doesn't change. The magicians do the same as Aaron does. By their dark arts, they turn water into blood and Pharaoh's not going to accede to Moses' demands to let the children of Israel leave. Pharaoh's seen his own magicians do what appears to be the same as Aaron and so Pharaoh won't be convinced. And even after the third plague, the plague of Nats, when the Egyptian magicians, well, they can't replicate the miracle that's happened under God's authority.

And you see that continuing through the remainder of the plagues, the Egyptian magicians can't replicate them. But even then, Pharaoh's heart remains hardened. He's not going to succumb to the demand of Moses, even when the plagues clearly reveal God's power and that God alone is to be obeyed.

[16:44] But isn't this the tragedy of the present time? The revealing of God in nature. The revealing of God even in the pandemic. The revealing of God in the transformed lives of those who were once lost but now are found and are trophies of God's grace.

Still, we see the Pharaoh-like obstinacy, that hard-heartedness that refuses to repent. And the chilling words that we read in Exodus 7.23, we might even say are words that speak of today's world.

Pharaoh turned and went into his house and he did not take even this to heart. Instead of turning to God, Pharaoh turned to his own security.

He turned to his house. In other words, his own self-perceived security, his own way of life. He turned to his own gods. He turned to find peace in what was no peace.

And for any of you, you've seen the evidence of God's power. You've seen his judgments. And yes, you've even seen his love and mercy, particularly towards the transforming lives of all who are Christ's in that, in these lives that have been transformed by grace.

[18:15] And yet, you'll still go to your place of security. That security is, there's no security at all. I plead with you to turn to the Lord.

And turn to the Lord, yes, who in judgment is showing mercy to you, giving you that time to repent so that you who are lost might be found.

Even hear the voice of God calling to you now to come to you, to come to him, to give your life to him, to give your life through faith in the Lord Jesus, to see the Lord Jesus who, Jesus who faced the judgment of God against sin when Jesus was made sin for us so that you might not face eternal death but might know eternal life in him.

Well, what of the result? What of the result of these plagues? If you're to read over the chapters that tell of the first nine plagues and see that not one of them changed, not permanently anyway changed Pharaoh's heart.

But we have to say this, that they did impact the Israelites. As we've been saying all along, God's judgment involves his mercy towards those who are his.

[19:43] And of course that mercy would be seen ultimately in the tenth plague, the plague of death when God passed over the homes of the Israelites who daunt their homes with the blood of the Lamb but the judgment of God against the Israelites and the putting to death of the firstborn.

God willing, we'll come to that to tenth plague later. But the whole point even, as we will see in the tenth plague of the people of Israel being separate for God.

We see this even in the earlier plagues. If you go to some of the earlier plagues, the fourth plague, the fifth plague, even the ninth plague, the plague of darkness.

the fourth plague, the plague of the flies. The land that the Israelites dwelt in were spared from that judgment.

The infestation of the plague not hitting the Israelites. Or the fifth plague, the plague on the livestock. The Israelites' cattle were spared but not the Egyptians.

[20:49] And then the ninth plague when Egypt was in darkness that were told, chapter 10, verse 23, what the people of Israel had liked where they lived.

See, even in the judgments that God was giving through these plagues, God was revealing that distinction. He was showing that His favor rests in His people but at the same time condemning those who are not His.

Remember what God would later say to Moses, I will have mercy in whom I will have mercy. And of course, that mercy of God has nothing to do with anything intrinsic within the Israelites but all of God's grace.

And God's judgments here would reveal and did reveal that God's people were separate unto God. That God's people were separate in His divine love.

Just as we see through the history of time, even God's judgments revealing that same truth and even in the judgments of God given so that God's people return to Him, even in the discipline of God's judgment, God's people returning to God.

[22:10] But those who reject God knowing condemnation through judgment. And yes, while we see the purpose of God, God's judgments to reveal who God truly is before Pharaoh, we have to say also that the plagues were given for the sake of the Israelites.

Just before the eighth plague, the plague of locusts, God said to Moses, well, He gave the, as we read there in the first few verses of chapter 10, God spoke of the purpose of these plagues as far as the Israelites were concerned.

That you may tell in the hearing of your son and 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.

Moses, you see, was, Moses was to set an example to the Israelites who'd lived through these times of plague. And they were to tell successive generations of the mighty hand of God. God, having been at work in the lives of His people, rescuing them from the oppression of the Egyptians. God revealing His power over His enemies, even seen in these sights and signs of God's power seen in the plagues of Egypt.

[23 : 33] Isn't that an important truth for all of God's people? That you tell your children of our great God so that they will know God and pass that on to successive generations.

And it's, of course, crucial to any age that Christian parents pass on that good news to their children and their homes. And yes, even in the current climate that we're living in, when there's so much intense pressure on our children to be removed from even hearing the name of the Lord Jesus. Jesus. And you know, we hear an awful lot in our media at the moment about phobias of all different kinds. Of course, so often directed against Christians.

But isn't there that Christian phobia that we see and hear so often? Well, with that in mind, remind your children and your grandchildren and your nephews and your nieces of the God who reigns. Remind them, tell them of the God who came to deliver his people from the oppression of sin. The God who sent the Lord Jesus as one and only son to bring freedom to the captives and to set at liberty those who are oppressed, oppressed by sin.

[24 : 57] We all who are the Lord's have to be reminded of this great truth and you have that responsibility. A responsibility even towards future generations, generations whom we'll never see in our lifetime, but generations still to come.

So that even through the telling, the passing on of the baton, telling the good news of the Lord Jesus, doing so through successive generations, telling that God reigns, that God is over all, telling that there is no other God but God, telling that God is great in power, that he's majestic in glory, that he is able to save, telling that God's judgments are right.

Why? Because he is Lord, because he is God. Amen. And let us pray. O Lord, our God, our great God, our great King, you who rule over all, you who are holy, sovereign, glorious, Lord, we bow before you and we pray, Lord, that even in the judgments that you send, that you cause us all to be impacted by, may even, we know that in your judgment there is mercy and we thank you for that. Lord, may it be that even this morning and amongst the many who hear the word proclaimed, that there'll be those who will turn, turn from sin, turn from evil and come to you by faith, faith in the Lord Jesus, Jesus, who faced the judgment of God against sin and did so for our sake.

Lord, hear us as we continue before you in worship and we pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.