

Frogs, Gnats and Flies

Exodus 8:1-32

Frogs, gnats and flies. I hope you don't think that the purpose of this sermon this afternoon is to explain and expound upon the details of those three plagues. Actually, the descriptions are quite self-explanatory, but if you go away this afternoon simply with a renewed acquaintance of the specifics of those rather revolting events, then I have certainly failed in my job.

And yet,

2 Tim. 3:16 "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

So how does a description of frogs, gnats and flies equip you for every good work? What is the doctrine we have before us this afternoon? What is the reproof or correction to train you in righteousness? That's my challenge in preaching today.

I'll skip over the biology of it all. You all know what frogs are. And gnats, a Hebrew word sometimes translated lice. And flies, or more generally, simply insects. Actually, it's all pretty disgusting to me. Frogs might sometimes seem to be sort of cute, but lice and flies seem to me to a very uninteresting subject to study. Especially when you consider what the Lord actually did to the Egyptians. These things were everywhere.

v.3-4

They were crawling with frogs! Even in their baking pots and bread pans and ovens.

v.17

v.21

That is really gross! But breathed out by God, and profitable for instruction in righteousness. So where do we start? I want you to see that each of these plagues teaches us something very specific, and very significant, about God. Beginning with frogs.

We've seen this before, and I won't belabor the point, but it is important to identify the judgment of God. This is a doctrine that makes many people today extremely uncomfortable. God is love, we hear so constantly. But a God of judgment? That is beyond the scope of the common understanding of God in the mind of the ordinary citizen even of our own country.

A god of judgment seems suited to the religious fanaticism of those who serve the false God of Allah with the modern day reign of terror. A God of judgment fits more with the religion of radical Islam than Jesus Christ, so thinks our society today.

A god of judgment fits the context of the Old Testament, we are told. It is the old, out-dated expression of God that really has nothing in common with the permissive, good-natured god of the New Testament. And, of course, in consistency with that shallow thinking, very few churches will feature a series of sermons on the ten plagues any more. But here we are with...

I. FROGS: THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

To review the context,

v.1

Then the warning,

v.2

This was a judgment, a judgment upon the nation of Egypt.

A. God will judge his enemies.

v.5-6

All of this shows us the nature of the God whom we love and serve. All of this shows us what God will do for his people, in judging his enemies. And all of this shows what God will yet do in the future. So let's look at Revelation 16. First the context,

Rev. 16:1. "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

We read about the first six angels pouring out their bowls of wrath, and notice how just and righteous God the judge shows himself to be.

Rev. 16:5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things. 6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due." 7 And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

I'll skip down to verse 13, what we read about between the sixth and seventh bowls.

Rev. 16:13 "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. 15 "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." 16 And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon."

This is the judgment of God, symbolized by the destruction of the city and nation of Babylon.

Rev. 16:19 "Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath."

Beloved, such a judgment yet awaits the unbelieving world! As Peter writes,

2 Peter 3:7 "But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

The day of the Lord will come. That's the message of the frogs! And with that certain promise we see back in Exodus that,

B. God will humble his enemies.

He will humiliate them! Utterly and completely destroy them! Look at what happened to Pharaoh.

v.7

So far so good.

v.8-11

Such a mockery, in irony. Moses even lets Pharaoh pick the time and the day for the plague to be released.

v.9 "Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile."

God did as Moses requested.

v.12-14

All of that in order to bring about his own victory, showing

Pharaoh for who he is, humbling him by honoring him as if he really had a good standing with God. It's all irony, and all understood in the context of God "wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory."

That's Romans 9. That's God humbling his enemies, here by enduring with much longsuffering their wickedness, they whom he calls "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction."

And in this,

C. God will expose the sinfulness of his enemies.

As evil and wicked as Pharaoh is, it even gets worse here.

God's gives him the honor of picking the time to end the plague, which comes about. And then we read,

v.15

As soon as his own suffering was alleviated, no longer would he honor God nor do as he promised. So deeply imbedded in the fallen human soul is this deadly trait of selfish self-interest. That cycle is, of course, repeated for each of these plagues.

Pharaoh's hardening of his heart is also mentioned in verses 19 and 32.

The frogs bring us God's judgment upon that horrible expression of sinful rebellion. Then, the gnats. Here we get a more complete glimpse into the whole subject of the power of God.

II. GNATS: THE POWER OF GOD.

I read,

v.7

Now look at,

v.18

They failed! They failed because God took away their supernatural strength. God withdrew his permission for their exercise of spiritual power, for they intended that power for evil. Such a great contrast is shown here,

v.16-17

Aaron threw down his rod, and lice rose out of the dust of the ground. This one couldn't be imitated. So against the backdrop of the absolute, unlimited power of God, we see,

A. The limited power of man.

Very limited.

Remember when man tried to exalt himself in his own power, the first time it was attempted on a national or worldwide scale? The tower of Babel.

Gen. 11:4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

"Let us make a name for ourselves." So it is always among mankind!

Gen. 11:5 "But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. 7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from

there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. 9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.”

Such is the way of God. Those who exalt their own power will be shown for what they are! Like Pharaoh, those who rebel against God in the quest for their own power shall be forced to submit to...

B. The finger of God.

That’s such a fascinating phrase.

v.19

I hope you clearly understand that language. Obviously, God does not have a body. God doesn’t exist in the form of a man, with ten fingers and ten toes, so there is an element of symbolism here. But extremely meaningful symbolism, for “the finger of God” is nothing more than “the power of God,” or the “working of God,” “the act of God.”

When Pharaoh’s magicians recognized the “finger of God”, they saw that work of God for what it was. Today, we would probably use the expression “the hand of God.” Or the more legal language often related to insurance coverage, referring to an event as an “act of God.” In other words, an act beyond human control and apart from human responsibility.

Yet too often, in great and tragic events, we don’t want to ascribe to God his power. We don’t see “the finger of God,” or don’t acknowledge it. We have all but lost that reference. Even something as great and awful as the COVID pandemic. Is that the finger of God? Of course it is. And the claim that “God had nothing to do with that,” we were told is ridiculous. But today, as

a nation, as a culture, we refuse to see the finger of God in anything, because we tend to think or believe that God is uninvolved, detached from the daily lives of the creatures inhabiting this earth.

Now, I’m not going to begin to try to speak for God about exactly what it was he was intending with reference to COVID.

I’m certainly not about to get into all the politics of that event in a sermon. But I will say this, that was the finger of God! That was the hand of God. That was the work of God in accomplishing his own eternal purposes.

If something bad happens to you or to someone you know, I won’t rush in with all the easy answers about what it all means and what God is trying to teach you. But I will rush in to say this, about any circumstance of your life and any circumstance of my life, the finger of God is at work.

The sinfulness of man and the hardness of his heart is all the more made evident when God makes the work of his hands obvious and man responds by suppressing that obvious reality. As did Pharaoh.

v.19

There is a fascinating New Testament reference to this power of God in Luke 11. Jesus was challenged about casting out demons, accused of working in the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.

Luke 11:17 “But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. 18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. 19 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they

will be your judges. 20 But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

There it is. Jesus claims the power of God, for he uses “the finger of God.” And thus he dares to say, “the kingdom of God has come upon you.” The kingdom is come, upon earth, for Jesus casts out demons by the finger of God. And he makes himself even clearer with an illustration,

Luke 11:21 “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. 22 But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils.”

The stronger man has come. He has overcome the other strong man, and divides his spoils. So the kingdom of God has come. And the power of God has come. And Satan has been overcome. He is now, and throughout this age, already bound! This world is not under the sovereign domain of Satan. Jesus is not in exile up in heaven waiting for some future millennium when he can reestablish his kingdom.

“But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.” It is here now among us. It is made evident and visible in the church of Jesus Christ. We have Jesus’ own promise, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.” And that ought to be of great encouragement to you!

So we have in this third plague upon Pharaoh a demonstration of that same finger of God. And then we have a demonstration of the holiness of God. The flies.

III. FLIES: THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

You never would have guessed, would you, that God would

use flies to demonstrate his holiness. Think for a moment about the meaning of the word “holy.” Do you know what it means? What is a holy day? What is a holy place? Or, for that matter, a holy person.

Let me answer broadly at first. If something is holy, it is set apart. It is made separate, distinguished from all the rest. And that is what we see with the flies.

A. God will separate his people from the world. v.22-23

Now, how is this Scripture profitable for doctrine, for training in righteousness? Consider this great principle of God calling his people to be separate from the world. God himself makes that distinction, calling us to be a holy nation. Then he calls us to be holy ourselves!

Consider,

2 Cor. 6:14 “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” 17 Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” 18 “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.”

Do you see the connection? “I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” Therefore “come out from among them and

be separate, says the Lord.” Peter puts it this way,

1 Peter 1:14 “...as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.””

Be holy! That’s the reproof! That’s the training in righteousness made clear by the plague of flies. God is setting apart a holy nation unto himself. He is separating them from the rest of the world, that they might show themselves to be holy.

v.23 “I will make a difference between My people and your people.”

That’s holiness. And most of all,

B. God will separate his people for their worship.

This is when our separateness, our holiness, is made most evident. When we gather, as Christians, to offer our sacrifices of worship to God. And that’s what is behind all these plagues, as well, for the people were simply requesting the freedom to take a three days’ journey out of Egypt in order to worship God in an acceptable place. We saw that back in chapter 5. Here in chapter 8,

v.25-28

That request, as before, was denied after the plagues were stopped, but the obvious point is so well made. The people couldn’t just worship anywhere. They had to worship at the place which God had made acceptable. Not in Egypt.

v.26 “It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God.”

They understand something that all too many Christians today don’t have a clue about. Worship is regulated by God! The worship that we are to offer before God is regulated by his own commands! We just can’t do whatever we want! Moses and Aaron understood that well.

v.27

So there it is. Frogs, Gnats and flies. The power of God separating the people of God as he judges the enemies of God. Beloved, that is what God is doing today! Throughout this whole age.

So let me end with an exhortation. An application. Let me end with a focus upon training in righteousness that you might be equipped for every good work. I’ll end with Peter’s exhortation, immediately after telling us about this coming judgment that we see prefigured in the plagues upon Egypt. So consider the frogs, gnats and flies. The power of God’s judgment. And then heed these words:

2 Peter 3:10 “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.”