



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Flies in the Ointment

May 18, 2025

Exodus 8:20-32

Clint Pressley

²⁰ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. ²¹ Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. ²² But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. ²³ Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.'"" ²⁴ And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies.

²⁵ Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." ²⁶ But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? ²⁷ We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us." ²⁸ So Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me." ²⁹ Then Moses said, "Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD." ³⁰ So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. ³¹ And the LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. ³² But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.

(Pastor Prays)

If you're a Baptist preacher, you probably have Charles Haddon Spurgeon as your favorite preacher in the world, or at least some sort of hero. Charles Haddon Spurgeon is a hero of mine. In fact, I have a pair of cufflinks with his face on them. That's hero status right there. If you come to my house, you'll hear me call out to our Beagle dog, his name is Spurgeon. By the way, be careful if you get a Beagle for a pet; they last a long time. Charles Spurgeon said that when it pleases God, by his judgment, to humble people, he is never at a loss for means to do so. He uses lions. He uses lice. He uses famines. He uses flies. In the armor of God, there are weapons of every kind. Not only that, Phil Ryken, who is a preacher in the Midwest, said long before the Angel of Death snatched Pharaoh's firstborn son, it was the little things that got to Pharaoh. God used tiny insects to humble the most powerful man in the world and to teach him all kinds of lessons about this great and awesome God.

Now we're right here in the 4th plague, and God is teaching Pharaoh about his existence and his power. Pharaoh will believe that there is a God. He will not have a saving faith in God. He will know that if there is a God who loves his people and punishes his enemies, it's the God of the Bible. It's the God that has promised that he will save you if you believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It's the God of the Bible. That's why we preach like we do. It's the God who will carry you through. And what I want to do is learn with Pharaoh. What did Pharaoh learn? Here's the theme of the sermon. Pharaoh learned...

God is Powerful to Save and Loves to Provide

I want you to see this God; he is powerful to save. Pharaoh will see God is powerful and he loves to provide. So here's what I want to do. Let's walk through the passage. I'm just going to be a tour guide. Let me just walk through and point out a couple of things for you to see that you may not have noticed, and then we'll come back and make some application. Join me there in verse 20.20 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. We are walking into the 4th plague. Just by way of review, the first two plagues came out of the water. Remember the blood in the Nile. The Nile ran with blood. The fish died. It's a terrible experience. After that came the frogs. All the frogs came and were everywhere, so they came out of the water. The second plague came from the Earth. He reached down and picked up the dust, threw it up in the air, and turned it into lice and

mosquitoes. So that was terrible. That's why the third plague came out of the Earth. So, we've had water and the Earth, and now we have the air. Here come the flies.

There is a purpose behind all of this. We're going through the Book of Exodus. Exodus is the gospel in the Old Testament. So we go through Exodus because there we find a template of God saving his people out of slavery. That template becomes a picture of the gospel. How you were at one point a slave to sin, but God, in his goodness, sent Jesus, who lives perfectly and dies on the cross, to take away the wrath that you deserve. Do you trust that he did that for you? You are taken out of slavery to sin. You are brought into the family of God. It is your own personal exodus. So that's why we go through the Book of Exodus, and we see the pattern for God saving his people.

The statement God tells Moses and Aaron is to talk to Pharaoh. Pharaoh is going to be going up to the water. It's the same sort of thing he has done before. Why is it going to the Nile? We don't know. Maybe he's worshipping his God there. God says, here's what you're going to tell him. Let my people go that they will serve me. It is the sixth time we've seen that phrase. Let my people go. This is one constant theme. God is saying to Pharaoh, they are not your people; they are my people. And here comes the plague in verse 21. *²¹ Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand.* That sounds terrible. Don't forget the last plague back on Mother's Day. All those frogs died, so many of them that they piled them up out in the driveway. And there's a big pile of dead frogs out in the driveway, stinking up the land. They're rotten, and those flies are coming in, and they're going to love those piles of frogs. The flies are going to land on those rotten, stinking frogs that are decomposing. It's terrible. These flies are going to swarm. We don't like to have only one fly in the house. If there's a fly in the house, you get a fly swatter. Or if you don't have that, if you're not old enough to keep those things around your house, then you roll up a magazine, and you chase it as if it were some sort of wild beast.

Man, when Connie and I first got married, she had a 1984 Toyota Camry hatchback. It was not anything to look at; it was a terrible-looking car, but it was reliable and nice. And we're riding to the grocery store one day, I'm driving, and there is a fly in the car, and it lands on the windshield in front of me, and in my zeal to kill that fly as fast and as hard as I could, I cracked

the entire windshield. We don't like to be around flies. That's one fly; think about 10 or 12 or billions of flies. In fact, when you see the threat here, it is not just that you're going to be covered up with flies; there are going to be so many flies that they're dropping on the ground, and you are walking across, crunching them. You see how terrible it is here. Happy graduation, guys. Alright, that's verse 21. So, it's going to be terrible for the Egyptians.

But look at verse 22. This is a good verse. For the very first time, we see this preferential treatment of the people of God, as stated explicitly in verse 22. ²² *But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.* ²³ *Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.* This is the first time we've heard of Goshen since Genesis 45. This is where they live. There's going to be like a bubble around God's people. Why does he do that? Why? So that you may know that I am the Lord and that I am in the midst of the earth. Why does he save you? Remember, this is a template for salvation. Why is it that you heard the gospel, and you realize that God is holy, and you are a sinner? You deserve to go to hell, but in God's mercy, you see Christ live perfectly and died on the cross. God raised him from the dead, and you realized that he did that for you. There was a day when you trusted that Christ did that for you. You turned from your sin and trusted that Jesus alone will save you. Why? That wasn't just so that you could go to heaven. That is a glorious thing that you get to go to heaven, and as you age, it will become more and more glorious. One day, you will be with God. But God saves you; he saves his people so that people will know you are saved and glorify him. You know what your testimony is.

But some of you are walking through such adversity? Why? Because there is a testimony there that the world around you sees. How does she handle that? It is because she's been transformed by the grace of God found in Jesus. There's a testimony to this. So here is a picture of the very first time God set his people apart. When you keep reading these plagues, you're gonna see it again here in a little bit. So I want to sort of get that into your mind verse 22, ²² *But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.* And then verse 23. ²³ *Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.* If you have a study Bible, it probably says somewhere in the footnote that the

word division is the word redemption. God is going to put a line between the Pharaoh's people and God's people, and the line between them is a line of redemption. There are those who are out and those who are in, and the way you are in is that you come through the line of redemption. Here is a picture of the Cross of Jesus. Those who are in Christ are God's children. Those who are not are going to hell. And the bridge across is the Cross of Jesus Christ. There is a line of redemption in verse 23.

Verse 24 says, ²⁴*And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies.* Not just a few. I mean, they're flying everywhere. They are all in the house. They're on the floor. You get the picture. Great swarms of flies are in the house of Pharaoh and the servants throughout all the land of Egypt. The land was ruined by the swarms of flies.

Notice here in verse 25 that Pharaoh doesn't call the magicians. Up to this point, it's been Moses and Aaron against Pharaoh and the magicians. And you have these groups of people meet up. But Pharaoh doesn't call the magicians anymore. Notice in verse 25 that Pharaoh's magicians are not working. ²⁵*Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land."* But look at the caveat within the land. Be careful. You're always going to be pushed to compromise. Here's Pharaoh's negotiation. You can do it, but you've got to stay close where I can see you. He is offering up a win-win situation. But there is almost never a win-win situation following Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It's almost never a win-win to follow Christ.

So Pharaoh puts this forward and Moses sees right through it. He says to him, ²⁶*But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us?"* Moses said it's not right. I can't do it. It would not be right for us to do that, and I'll give you a couple of reasons why. If we sacrifice to the Lord our offerings, they will be an abomination to the Egyptians. It will be similar to walking into a Muslim Mosque and sacrificing a pig or going into a Hindu temple and slaughtering a cow. If we do this in front of the Egyptians, they not only will be put off by it, they are going to stone us. They'll try to kill us.

So that's good sense and here are some practical reasons. The Lord will always provide a way out. Here's a spiritual reason. ²⁷ *We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us.*” God has given us a command, and we must obey that command. It is always better to fear God than to fear man. And you will always be presented with the choice to compromise. So Moses says, number one, it doesn't make any good sense. If we do this, they're gonna kill us. And number two, what's important is that God has told us to do this, so we're going to do it his way. So in verse 28, ²⁸ *So Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me.”* There is a sense of self-importance. If you don't know the poem Invictus, go look it up later, Invictus. Here's this idea of Pharaoh as the master of his fate. I will let you go sacrifice to the Lord your God. And look at this personal note. Plead for me. Pray for me. Moses said alright. ²⁹ *Then Moses said, “Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”* Now look, here is Moses; he knows who he's dealing with. He'd been burnt before. Moses is not naive. It's one thing to forgive and forget, and this is when you extend forgiveness; you do that, and reconciliation happens. But you're not naive anymore. Moses says, look, don't cheat us again. He knows what's going to happen.

³⁰ *So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD.* God uses prayer. I'll talk about that a little bit later. Look what the Lord did in verse 31, ³¹ *And the LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained.* That's a miracle right there that the Lord provided. It's a miracle that was synthesized. Verse 32. ³² *But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.* Hey, don't do this. God is powerful to save and loves to provide.

So that's the running commentary. You now have a grasp on the 4th plague and what it means. So how, then, do you apply it? What are the truths that you can walk out with? Here's the first one, number one.

God does not change

You'll see that in verse 20. ²⁰ *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me."* It is the exact same thing; God has said this six times now. He'll keep saying the exact same thing. This speaks to the immutability of God. That means that God does not change. You can start reading in Genesis and read all the way through to Revelation. There you have the exact same God. There is not a God of the Old Testament and then a God of the New Testament. There's not a way God works with people in the Old Testament, and then a way he works with people in the New Testament. The entire Bible tells the whole story of the gospel. The story is that God is a holy God who created us in his image. You have great dignity because you are made in the image of God. We are so proud of our graduates. While they are made in the image of God, we want them to succeed. But that image of God in us has been disfigured by sin. You don't have to teach people to sin. A lot of parents who are here today know that you don't have to teach your child to sin. As soon as he was old enough to understand what he might get away with, he took a run at it. Sin shows itself, and that sin develops along with everything else. That sin becomes an affront to God. It's an offense to God. It ought to be, and needs to be, and must be punished because the justice of God calls for punishment for sinners. But God, in his goodness, sees that we couldn't withstand the punishment. So what does he do? He sends Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man; this is the gospel. Jesus, who was prophesied in the Old Testament, lives perfectly as we were intended to, keeping all the laws of God. And then, after living perfectly, he goes to the cross. The cross is the place of judgment and punishment. At the cross, he takes the punishment that we deserve. And if you trust him, if you put your faith in Jesus, he gives you the righteousness that he earned. So, the story of the whole Bible is that if you are a Christian, God has loved you in Christ, and he looks at you as if you are as perfect as Jesus. And that's the story of the whole gospel. This plague reminds us that God does not change. I'm going to give you a second lesson that I think you can learn from this plague, number two.

God does not treat everyone the same

We're all looking for fairness, so let me just tell you how God works. According to this passage, God does not treat everyone the same. Let me just point out a couple of things. In verse 20,

what does he say? Let my people go. They're my people, and your people are Satan's people. I have people who belong to me. Those are the people I want you to let go. These are the clear edges of Christianity. Otherwise, we would be universalists. We are not universalists. We are Christians. We believe that God has his people in Christ. That God initiates distinction. You'll find that all through the next few plagues, all but the Sixth. Look with me at verse 22. ²² *But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.* I'm going to make sure that they are protected. They will be treated differently than all of the Egyptians. Not only that, verse 22 says I'm going to do that so that everybody will know I am in the midst of my people. Verse 23 says there is a line of division. That word is redeemed. The truth is that God does not treat us all the same. Those who are his are treated with love, grace, and mercy. Those who are not are told to depart. What does Jesus say? There are those who are his sheep on his right hand. Those who are goats on his left. And every bit of it, when you think about salvation and how God works and how he's treated you, every bit of it is based on God's grace through your faith in Christ, every bit of it. It has nothing to do with how good you might be in this world. All of it has to do with how perfect Christ is in his life.

Some of you like country music. Some of you like the original country music, like real country music. Some of this country music today, I don't even know what it is. If you reach way back, not quite far as Hank Williams Senior, but come up a little bit, there you'll find Johnny Cash standing all by himself. Johnny Cash had all these great songs. He became a Christian late in life, and then very late in life, after he had retired, he came back and started singing again. If you listen to some of his music from his older self, some of it is dark. But a lot of it has Christian themes. One song he sings is entitled, *When the Man Comes Around*. It's a spooky song, but it's about the return of Christ, and one line he gives is that everybody will not be treated the same. God's people, who are in Christ, are protected from the wrath of God. Those who are not in Christ take the full brunt of God's judgment. So, what does it mean for me personally? Well, for me personally, that gives me great confidence in life. That regardless of what happens to me in life, if I am his and he loves me, then he is using everything for his glory and my good. That makes it compelling for us as a congregation. If we believe that only those who are in Christ are saved, that means that untold thousands and millions around us are going to hell. It's why we press toward missions. It is why we share the gospel. That's why every Sunday; I'll share the

gospel. It also means that we have a sharp edge in our doctrine; we are doctrinally clear on what the Bible says about the Holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, and the redeeming power of God.

This points us to God's love and provision for his people. He does not treat everyone the same. There's a third lesson I'd like you to see, number three.

God hates compromise

You will always be pushed to moderate a biblical position. You will always be pressed to come outside the bounds of that, and it's always subtle. You see that over in verse 25. This is how Satan works. ²⁵ *Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land."* So Pharaoh thinks it's a win-win. I'll let you go sacrifice, but you won't obey completely. You're always going to be pushed if you are a born-again Christian. When you believe the Bible and you go off to college or the workforce, you will be pushed to maintain integrity. You'll be pushed to not be quite as honest. You'll be pushed to compromise on what you believe about the gospel. This is why we do expository preaching. You'll be pushed to believe the Bible is really the turning point. If you give up the authority of the Bible, if you give up the inerrancy of scripture, then you've lost the whole thing. The world we live in today, over the last 20 years, is the biblical sexual ethic. You will be pushed to moderate your position, to back off being so stringent. Because when we read what the Bible teaches about sexuality, about sex reserved for a man and a woman in marriage, or about what it means to be a man or what it means to be a woman, or the sinfulness of homosexuality, or the last 10 years, transgenderism and you apply the Bible there, the world is going to push and tell you to ease up on that.

It's always subtle. But God always gives us, in verse 26, a practical way out, and in verse 27, there is a spiritual way out. There are practical reasons not to do this. So, in verse 26, Moses says, look, if we sacrifice right here close to everybody, the Egyptians will see it, and they're going to kill us. But more importantly, in verse 27, here's the real reason for doing right. God has called us to do that. We don't have any choice but to obey what God has told us to do. Here's a reminder to any of you here. You face it every single day to compromise your convictions on what the Bible teaches. God hates compromise. Let me give you another thing. I

don't know how else to say this. I don't know if this is even the right way to say it, but here it goes, number four.

God blesses good sense

Act like you have a little sense. Use some discernment. I get that in verses 28 and 29. ²⁸ *So Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me."* Moses hears Pharaoh say, go ahead, I'll let you go and worship and then notice verse 29. ²⁹ *Then Moses said, "Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD."* Moses knows what he's dealing with, and the lesson I hope that you can learn is don't be naive. God gave you a brain and the ability to discern right from wrong. There are times when you feel something is not quite right. God gave that to you as a discernment, so I probably need to back out of this. Now, I'm not telling you to be cynical. Some of you have taken that discernment over to the other side. You can rain on whatever parade somebody comes up with. I'm not saying being cynical; what I'm saying is God has given you a mind to know that you can't take everything at face value. What did Paul say in Colossians 2:4? ⁴ *I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.* Pharaoh had already cheated Moses one time. Moses knew he probably would do it again. So what do we do then? We trust an all-sovereign God. Use your brain to make decisions about places you go with the friends that you keep and with the people that you date, with the potential to marry, with the job that you take, with the debt that you incur. One of the lessons you learned here from Moses is God actually blesses good sense. And here is the last one, number five.

God answers prayer

Simply put, you find Moses there in verses 30 - 32. God performs an unbelievable miracle, taking every fly away. Like, there's not one left. And you know how he does it? He does it through the vehicle of prayer. God could have just wiped them out. He could have just taken that miracle and done it without Moses. Instead, Moses asks God, and God responds and moves. Why does he do that? So that a watching world can see that the power is not in Moses, not in a person, but in God. What do we pray? Why do we pray? Praying makes us dependent;

we need God to work. Praying builds our faith. We see God enter with these small graces, these small provisions that give us just enough hope to keep moving. Do you know what else praying does? Praying drives us to the Bible because we don't know exactly what to pray. So we go to the Psalms, and we read, and we learn how to pray. Praying sanctifies our hearts.

Sometimes, God delivers his people from suffering. Sometimes he does. And sometimes God delivers his people through suffering. Always though, God is powerful to save. God loves to provide. My hope is for all of you, and for our graduates that are listening, my hope is that you will trust him. That you will seek him, that you will love him and know him as he's revealed himself to us in Christ

(Pastor prays)