



2025 Weekly Devotions

Week of: November 17th - 23rd

Sermon: November 16th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
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November 17

2 Corinthians 1:5

It appears as we enter this 9th chapter of Exodus and the 5th through 7th plagues, that the focus shifts from plagues that were undoubtedly bothersome, aggravating, and nasty, to three that are directed against the very possessions of Egypt. In the 5th plague, the livestock are destroyed. In the 6th, it is both beast and man who are struck with boils all over their skin. Then in the 7th plague, it is many crops, cattle, and even people who refuse to heed the warning of the coming hailstorm from heaven who are beat down. Another interesting note is the emphasis on the distinction between God's chosen people and those who are not. In this case, the plagues that befell Egypt, did not touch the Israelites in the land of Goshen (v.26). God does not want us to miss the line that He is drawing between people who belong to Him and those who do not (v. 4). This distinction is first brought to our attention in Exodus 8:23.

I remember 30 years ago sitting in a religion class at Virginia Commonwealth University. I was beginning to discover in my own journey through God's Word that it appeared He revealed more of His will and clearer pictures of His truth as time passed. I recall talking to the professor and using the phrase "the evolution of revelation." He said to me, "flesh it out." I mention that only to say that I later learned that others before me had already realized this fact, and it was known as progressive revelation. This simply means that what I was beginning to realize was indeed true. God was manifesting more clearly His will as He moved humanity towards recognizing their own sinfulness, the need for a Redeemer, and the coming of the Messiah.

The point that I am attempting to make today dear ones is that what we read in Exodus 9 is an amazing account of God's ability and desire to protect His people from the "bad" things that fell upon the Egyptians from His own hand. The mistake that some people make is to assume this means that God is always going to keep His people from disease, harm, heartache, or even death. Folks say to me often, "He is the same God now as He was then so if He kept them from harm then He is supposed to keep us from harm now." They will even imply that if He does not, He is either not being fair, or we aren't pressing the "magic button" that unlocks some secret power that we are supposed to be experiencing.

The problems with this are many but I will focus today on the failure to understand progressive revelation. God is revealing to the people on the stage of history at the time of the Exodus, and the rest of us too through the reading of His word, a truth that there is a distinction between those who are saved and those who are not. He is teaching us that there is a judgment that befalls humanity that the redeemed are spared from. What He is not saying is that no evil ever befalls His people. We will learn as Scripture unfolds this very real truth. We all live in a fallen world and consequences of the original sin impact all of us today. Paul said, "We share in Christ's sufferings – abundantly" (2 Cor. 1:5). This is not a blanket statement that He will always keep us from harm in this life. I will attempt to address the differences between judgment and the consequences of living in a broken world.

November 18

Genesis 3:16-19; Hebrews 12:5-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:9

Today I want us to begin to consider the difference between judgment, discipline, and simple consequences of living in this world. Let me get us started by talking about what I mean by simple consequences. Recently, I was talking to my uncle Horace standing in his backyard when he pointed out some strawberry plants in a patch up near the house. He showed me where the deer had eaten the tops off most of the plants. He knows it is deer doing it because he saw them on a trail camera.

I mention this because it is important to know that these types of things happen all the time. I planted a nice, healthy magnolia tree for Johanna that I purchased from a nursery. It had grown to about 6 feet tall and was doing well. One morning I went outside to find that a deer had scraped every bit of the bark off the tree with its antlers. It went all the way around the little trunk and killed our tree. I was disappointed, saddened, and even angry. The truth is that occurred not because God was judging us, not because there was sin in my life, but solely because we live in a broken world where the effects of the “fall” impact us greatly. Those types of things just happen.

Now, it is important that we understand God rules in those areas too. I have no doubt that He could have stopped those deer from eating the strawberries or killing the magnolia tree. He chose not to stop them and to let the natural consequences of the curse on creation play out. I am equally convinced that He allows these things for our good. In those moments, we must exercise faith, understanding, contentment, and experience peace even as we suffer some degree of loss. In the big picture, they are just plants, and I can learn to fight harder and smarter to protect them from real threats in our world.

Then there are times when God deliberately disciplines us because of sin or disobedience. These are moments when we truly get a “smack down” that is meant to open our eyes, reorient our hearts, or to prevent us from further harm or chaos. God absolutely will discipline those whom He loves (Heb. 12:5ff). We should always examine ourselves when difficulties come our way to see if there is sin in our lives causing the punishment. Remember that God’s discipline is always meant to correct, to train, and to sanctify. He disciplines us because He truly does love His own. One of the worst possible responses from God towards a person is indifference. Discipline is not the opposite of love, indifference is. In Romans 1:24, 26, and 28, God demonstrates indifference towards the people who chose to continually reject Him.

The third category I mentioned at the outset was judgment. In Exodus 9, the plagues doled out upon the Egyptians were judgment. This was punitive and was demonstrations of God’s just wrath against persistent and unrepentant sin. It was payment for habitual sin and due to those who received it. I want to close briefly with a statement about how the Israelites were spared the wrath poured out on the Egyptians. This is an amazing picture or shadow of the fact that God would spare all who belonged to Him by pouring His wrath upon Jesus Christ. We will suffer the consequences of the fall, and we will experience discipline from the loving hand of our Father. But we will not experience judgment. He did!

November 19

Acts 5:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:9

I want to pick up where we left off yesterday to make the point clear. When I am thinking of judgment, I think the example of Ananias and Sapphira serves as a good demonstration. You recall from Acts 5 that they lied to Peter and the disciples but more importantly they lied to God about their offering to the Lord. If you recall the event recorded for us in Acts 5:1-11, you will know that God acted swiftly. The Bible tells us that first Ananias died on the spot and then shortly thereafter his wife died in the same way while maintaining and perpetrating the lie.

Folks, this is what I am considering when thinking of judgment. It was not corrective or sanctifying for them. For those who witnessed this event, it could surely serve as a teaching moment for them but not for Ananias and Sapphira. It was time for the wrath of God, and it was poured out to the fullest. It is important that I reiterate that I am not saying that we do not experience the impact of the “judgment” that was rendered when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. We all inherited our father Adam’s sin nature and as a result, suffer the fate of the punishment placed upon the man and the woman. Our wives still experience pain in childbirth and still struggle with male headship. Men still have to work hard and make a living by the sweat of the brow and toilsome labor. It truly is a struggle to make it sometimes.

One of the comforting truths and I would even say aspects of good news is that judgment will come. God will indeed judge the world. History will not lack a moral resolution. Perfect and complete justice will be realized. The good news for those of us who are in Christ is that we do not need to fear this impending judgment. The wrath our own sins deserve has already fallen on Jesus. We have been justified and now have genuine peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

Think of how horrible it has felt lately to feel like you are completely helpless against the horrible and self-serving politicians who have held American citizens captive to their ridiculous political games. God’s judgment is good news to my ears and my heart. I can rest knowing that judgment is coming. I rest because I know that it is written in the Bible that vengeance belongs to the Lord and He will carry it out in the right way and at the proper time. As we wait and trust God with judgment against those who deserve it, never fail to remember that we deserve judgment too so don’t get too haughty.

It is only by the grace and mercy of God that we need not worry about His wrath. 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9 says, “But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” His bow of wrath is no longer aimed at us dear ones. We deserve punishment just like the Israelites did even as the Egyptians were being judged. By God’s grace, mercy was extended instead and for us, Jesus took the wrath due us and gave us peace with God and His own righteousness to stand forgiven and accepted in our Father’s presence.

November 20

Genesis 15:16

I have written about judgment for a couple of days, so I want to make sure that we see it in the proper light of God's patience too. A verse that I have always found comforting and yet one that is often overlooked in the Old Testament is found in Genesis 15. There it is written, "...for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (v.16). That is on the end of a conversation that God is having with Abraham. God has told him that the Israelites would be servants (slaves) in a land (Egypt) not their own for four hundred years. God tells Abraham that He will bring judgment on that nation and deliver His people in the fourth generation.

What I find so interesting about that conversation is that God reveals that His people would not inherit or possess the land until the iniquity of the Amorites was full. This means that God was still extending them patience in regard to their sinfulness. He was still allowing them time to repent prior to the day when He would judge them harshly. In view of the judgment that is contained in much of the Old Testament, people will often go so far as to say that the God of the Old Testament is not the same as the God of the New. They draw this faulty conclusion because they are offended by His judgment. All the while, they fail to see the patience demonstrated through decades and even centuries of mercy.

I believe we could make a case that even as God is demonstrating His power through the plagues, He is also demonstrating His patience. Why ten plagues? Could it not be that it is due to His patience. I have failed to consider at times the many in Egypt who may have come to truly believe in our God through the plagues. We know that Pharaoh and His army were drowned in the Red Sea, and we know that the first born in Egypt died, but what about the others. Surely it is reasonable to believe that some came to faith in God. As a matter of fact, we can read in Exodus 9:20 that many of the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord actually obeyed the words of Moses concerning the impending hailstorm. I don't know if this was saving faith or fear, but it is plausible that some believed unto salvation.

Knowing the heart of God, I believe a better default would be to trust that He is good, wise, and loving in all that He does. My heart and mind tell me, based on the truth of the Bible, that God only brings in judgment when patience has been exhausted. Even when considering the plagues, there is an escalation in the harmful effects of each one. This of course culminates in the worst one of all – the death of the first born. It appears to me that God mingles patience with judgment and begins with less disastrous judgments which serve as warnings and appeals to repent.

I find what happened in the tenth plague so very telling and completely in step with the biblical doctrines of sin and salvation. More on this later, but I hope you see that the Israelites themselves had to prepare for the final judgment or they too would have suffered the same fate. Like the Egyptians, they were sinners and rebellious at heart as well. This meant that atonement by the shedding of blood had to cover them or death would have overtaken them as well. To God be the glory.

November 21

Psalm 98:1-9

Judgment is repulsive to so many in our society today. We live in a “My story, my truth” world in which no one is responsible for anything and everything is someone else’s fault. Our culture is one of entitlement with no punishment. In this society, judgment seems archaic, patriarchal, and just downright unintelligent. The truth of the matter is that judgment is good and necessary and if we could actually see what a world with no judgement looks like, we would reject it hands down.

I can imagine people reading the 98th Psalm and loving it. The Psalm is one detailing the amazing accomplishments of God to save His people. It is about singing and praising both of man and all of creation. Then we are hit with verse 9. That one says, “...for He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity.” I can imagine the music stops, the people quit dancing and shouting, and all of a sudden, a hush comes over the crowd. Someone says, “Ah, excuse me. What did you say? Did I hear you say you were going to judge the world and the people in it?” The party ends, the people walk away, and God is viewed as hateful, intolerant, and a bigot.

Church family, I want you to know that the reality of God’s judgment is a good thing. It is good news, and I want to tell you why. First, the truth of God’s judgment gives us hope and confidence that every wrong will be made right. This rotten wickedness that fills the halls of Washington will be dealt with. Every evil will be accounted for. Second, His justice truly is fair which is why Paul also speaks about “the day of (God’s) wrath, when *full* justice will be done (Rom. 2:5). If we don’t believe in that future judgment to come, our only hope for justice tends to be political justice in this life. Without God, such measures are all we have left. That is a sad thought, isn’t it? His justice will be fair because He knows even the secrets of men (Rom. 2:16).

Third, judgment reveals that we actually matter to Him and so does truth. Could you imagine relationships in which people are just indifferent to you? You know, they don’t really care what you do one way or another. Love causes us to care for one another and to make decisions in light of that care and love. Judgment is not the opposite of love! When we critique someone’s essay or sermon, or their job performance because we want them to get better it is because they do matter. Judgment serves in that way too.

I mentioned this one the other day, but judgment also can give us a greater sense of peace. Why? Because we can sincerely rest knowing that God is going to handle the situation properly. No injustice will slide by, so we need not be concerned about who is getting away with what. As Romans 2:16 says, “He sees even the secrets of men and will judge accordingly.” Judgment is a wonderful truth about our God’s love for us and hatred of injustice. We need not worry about judgment because remember that the Bible tells us Jesus Christ has already taken our judgment upon Himself on the cross.

November 22

Exodus 9:16; Romans 9:17-18

Once again, I need to address the truth presented to us in verse 16 of Exodus 9. There it says, “But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you My power, so that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth”. It is crystal clear that God had a plan for Pharaoh that included hardening his heart for the purpose of demonstrating His power over evil, the fact that He is God alone, and that nothing can stop Him from delivering His people from bondage. Pharaoh was born for this purpose and this moment in time by God’s sovereign choosing.

This does not mean that he was born guiltless or without sin. He was every bit a sinner just as the rest of us are. Without the intervention of the Holy Spirit regenerating his heart and giving him a new heart (Ezek. 36:26-27), he would be free to exercise the desires and will of his own heart just like all of mankind. Not only did God sovereignly choose not to regenerate his heart, He went even further and “froze” his heart in the condition that it was in. People who are hardened against God are really guilty. They have real fault. They are really blameworthy. God’s hardening does not take away guilt; it renders it certain.

Now how does this relate to God’s righteousness? Remember, that is the issue in this part of Romans 9:14, “Is there then injustice (unrighteousness) on God’s part?” It relates very directly. A definition of God’s righteousness is - God’s righteousness is His unwavering commitment to uphold and display the greatness of His glory and the honor of His name. Now we see why Paul chose to quote Exodus 9:16 in Romans 9:17 rather than one of the verses that relate directly to hardening. Instead, he quotes a verse that shows the purpose why God exercises His freedom in hardening as well as mercy.

He chose a verse that expressed the very purpose that relates implicitly to the righteousness of God and the hope of the world: namely, God’s commitment to uphold and display the honor and glory of His name — “that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” In other words, God’s freedom in mercy and hardening is at the heart of God’s glory and God’s name. This is what it means to be God — to be ultimately free and unconstrained from powers outside Himself. Treasuring and displaying this glory and this name is right. It is God’s purpose for the whole earth and He will reveal it to the whole earth.

Here is the point, and I hope it will help you stop questioning His goodness. He is just in all His dealings. The essence of His justice is the regard He has to the infinite worth of His own glory and His own name, which is governed by His own freedom and sovereignty. Let us remember and never forget this: the central act in the universe where God displayed this righteousness and vindicated the worth of His glory was in the sending of His Son to die so that He might pass over sins and justify the ungodly. This is not hard if you truly believe He is always good and that everything He does is right and upholds His glory and expands our joy. More on that tomorrow.

November 23

2 Corinthians 1: 8-10, 4:11-12

Today I want you to ponder the reality that God's sovereign plan led to great joy for His people; it always does. Pastor Aaron and I often talk about the fact that we do have "categories" for a huge majority of the subjects that we discuss. By that, I mean that we do understand and can follow the logic in a point that we are making because it fits into a belief or experience that we already hold or have known in our own lives.

For example, when we think about how God used Pharaoh's life of predetermined condemnation, it can cause us some consternation as we deal with thoughts of injustice or unfairness. I interject here that reminder that Pharaoh was truly guilty by his own commission of egregious sins throughout his life. He deserved judgment not simply because God ordained it, but also because he was truly guilty by his own free will. He was a sinner and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Now, let me get back to the idea of having a category for the reality that God used Pharaoh's life as a means of grace for the lives of countless others.

I think that we all understand that times exist in our lives when God ordains that suffering and pain become part of our reality. This suffering is often used for multiple reasons. One reason can certainly be to sanctify us as individuals. Paul said that he and his companions suffered greatly in Asia. The suffering was believed to be beyond what they could bear and so they thought for sure that death was eminent (2 Cor. 1. 8-9). He then writes, "But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead (v.9). So, one reason for our suffering is that we would be brought to greater dependence upon God and not ourselves. This would prove to be ultimately for our own good.

Then there is the purpose of bringing "life" to others through the price of suffering that we are paying. Paul later wrote, "For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So, death is at work in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:11-12). You see, God is putting us through the proverbial ringer and doing it so others will see His grace, mercy, and strength manifested in our lives so that they will learn to trust Him more. What a price to pay for the good of others. Parents do this for children, spouses do this for one another, Jesus did it for each of us, and Pharaoh, by God's decree, was used for the joy and blessing of God's people.

Can you imagine how the Israelite's faith must have grown as they witnessed the powerful hand of God judging and defeating the powerful nation of Egypt? They saw the ten plagues AND the parting of the Red Sea all because God wanted to show Himself mighty and trustworthy to each of them. I think about how we feel when someone we love and adore shows up and shows out in amazing ways. Isn't it awesome when one of us does something really well and the rest of us can say, "That's my pastor," or "That's my wife or child?" We have a category for admiration and faith growing as we witness the majesty and power of our great God on display in judgment against evil. We also have a category for understanding how one person's life can be used by God to do a work in another person's. God had the right to use Pharaoh to bless us, to teach us, and to grow our faith for our joy.