

Sermon – August 15, 2021
“I will bring one more plague”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Exodus 12:21-36

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Good morning! I hope that we all have been enjoying some more hot summer weather and are getting ready for the coming of fall and shorter, cooler days.

We have looked quickly at the first nine plagues God sent on Egypt as God has shown His mighty arm to Egypt through actions in creation. We also should recall that throughout all of those plagues, Pharaoh's heart has remained hardened and he has refused to let Israel go to worship the LORD. We may recall that the last plague we looked at was darkness. This plague, in addition to targeting the Egyptians through darkness, has targeted the Egyptian sun god Re, who in the Egyptian religion is considered to be Pharaoh's father. The plague of darkness is in part an attack on Pharaoh's god nature, and the plague of darkness has required him to summon Moses to ask him to pray to the true God to restore light in Egypt. This is a difficult plague for Pharaoh's heart, and in the exchange with Moses, Pharaoh tells Moses he will die if he sees Pharaoh's face again. Pharaoh's harsh words may be the result of this plague attack on his god nature. For those reading along in Exodus, in chapter 11, we will find that God speaks to Moses

again, telling him God will bring a final plague on Egypt. As Moses is leaving Pharaoh's presence after their heated exchange and Pharaoh's warning of Moses' death, God's word comes to Moses and when it does, it is as if he stops from going out of the presence of Pharaoh and turns back to Pharaoh and tells him, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out through Egypt. Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the female slave who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the livestock." Moses delivers these words of the LORD to Pharaoh and then leaves Pharaoh's presence in hot anger. The stage is set for the final plague, one more plague that will result in Pharaoh letting Israel go. Pharaoh hears God's words through Moses, but his heart is hardened by the LORD. This final plague will continue the LORD's demonstration of His power over the Egyptian gods. In this last plague, the LORD will attack Osiris, the god of the dead. The LORD's killing of the first born of Egypt will demonstrate Yahweh's power over yet another Egyptian god and will demonstrate again that Pharaoh is powerless over the God of Israel. Notice in God's words to Pharaoh, there is a reference to the killing of the first born of the livestock in the description of this coming plague. Cattle were also worshiped in Egypt and their death again demonstrates God's power in comparison over another aspect of Egyptian worship.

We should notice this last plague is not a general plague that will directly impact all people in Egypt but is a selective plague that only targets the first born. We should ask ourselves, "Why is God focused on the first born of Egypt?" Part of the answer to this question is that God is responding to Pharaoh's actions where he had the sons of Israel killed by having them thrown into the Nile. Among those killed would have been some who were first born. As we will see later in Exodus, the first born of all in creation are God's and this applies to the first born of animals as well as humans. Pharaoh has killed what is God's and God is going to bring a just reward to Pharaoh for those actions. God is about to punish Pharaoh and Egypt in the manner that they punished God's people. All of the plagues God has sent to this point have caused great discomfort and struggle for the Egyptians, and the plagues have continually demonstrated the LORD's power over the false gods of Egypt. This final plague will make God known more fully to a Pharaoh who says he does not know the Hebrew God.

I would like to think that if I had been one of the leaders in Egypt who feared the LORD, I would have been very uncomfortable at this moment. Moses has had a perfect track record of telling Pharaoh what God is going to do and then having God's words become action. Each of

the previous plagues has been reversible by prayer to God, but this plague will bring death, the death of one in each of the households of Egypt. Death is not something that is viewed by Egyptians as being a reversible condition. Pharaoh will not send for Moses to pray that the results of this plague will be removed and life will continue in Egypt. The results of this plague will be grief for each family in Egypt. There may be some very uncomfortable people in Pharaoh's court about the coming of this final plague. There may be some who will seek help from the Hebrews to learn what their God requires to prevent this plague from impacting their house.

Moses leaves Pharaoh and goes to the elders of Israel to give them instructions to prepare for the final plague. Each family is to kill a lamb, capture some of its blood, and use a branch of hyssop to smear some of the blood on the lintel and doorposts of their house. The blood is placed on the door frame so that God may see the blood and pass over all houses marked in this manner. A lamb without blemish will be killed so that the first born of Israel in a house may live. There is no indication of this plague being only for Egypt. If a house is not marked with the blood of a lamb, the Destroyer will enter and kill the first born. When Moses gives the Israelites instructions for Passover, he does not give them for one event, a one-time ceremony for the redemption of Israel. Instead, Moses gives instruction for a perpetual ordinance for Israel and their children to observe so that all generations will come to know of God's mighty act of redemption. This continuous observation also points to something else to come. It points to a future time when God will again act on behalf of His people.

In verse 27, we are told the people bowed down and worshiped when they heard this news. This is their response to what they heard. They worship the LORD for the promise of redemption from cruel slavery in Egypt. The people go and obey the words of the LORD given to them through Moses. They sacrifice a lamb, collect the blood, mark the lintel and posts of their doors with the blood of the lamb, roast and eat the lamb, and then prepare to leave Egypt when they are told to go. In the middle of the night, "the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt." One last plague has come, and in every house of Egypt from the prisoner in jail to Pharaoh sitting on the throne of Egypt, each house has someone dead. And a cry comes out of Egypt again, not from Israel to the LORD, but this time the cry is from the Egyptians. Those who had caused Israel to cry out to their God for redemption are now the ones crying out for help and relief, but none comes.

Notice how Pharaoh responds to this plague. He had told Moses in their last exchange after the plague of darkness that if he saw Moses' face again, Moses will be killed, yet now Pharaoh summons Moses and tells him, "Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD, as you said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!" These are not the words of a leader with a proud heart. These are now the words of one whose heart is broken before the LORD. Pharaoh, who said he did not know the LORD, now releases Israel to go and worship God. A hardened heart that the LORD knew is now broken, and Israel, at the price of Egypt's first born, is redeemed, set free to go with the LORD.

The Israelites are dressed, packed, and ready to leave. They take their kneading bowls with the next day's dough already prepared for baking and flee. They will eat this bread without allowing it time to rise, and this will become part of the regular celebration of Passover, to eat their bread unleavened as a reminder of what God has done. The Egyptians are eager for Israel to be gone and urge them to leave for fear they will all die. Israel has also followed Moses' instructions and asked the Egyptians for costly items of gold, silver, and clothing. Israel does not leave Egypt sent out as poor and empty-handed slaves. They leave with the riches of Egypt. The Israelites do not go out as poor slaves but as well-clothed, free people carrying the spoils of Egypt. They also don't leave celebrating the death of the first born of Egypt. They are quiet about what they have witnessed, for they know that they have been redeemed at the price of the first born of Egypt. The death of the first born is followed by the redemption of Israel, God's people. Israel will seek to keep the Passover so that they might remember that in death they are freed and that all generations should come to know of God's mighty acts on their part.

On the night when Jesus last celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples in Jerusalem over 1500 years later, Jesus takes the key elements of this service of remembrance of God's mighty acts that bring the redemption of Israel and redefines them for the coming kingdom of God. The blood that God will see will not be the blood of a lamb painted on the lintel and posts of a door to a house, but the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, the first born of God, shed and dripped onto the beam of a cross. Jesus' blood becomes the sign of a new covenant that is written on the hearts of believers. The blood of Jesus will not mark the doorways of a house that the Lord might see and pass over, but it marks those who believe in Jesus. His shed blood will now mark believers with the cleansing blood of the first-born son of God so that God will see the

blood of His Son and pass over their sin, bringing them from death to life. Those born in Egypt, or the world, who are reborn in Christ will now live because in their place God's first-born son will die so that there might be redemption of all of God's people in all of the world. This theme in the Old Testament of the death of the first born followed by redemption is transformed from a remembrance of what God did for Israel to a new action of God that redeems the world which God so loves.

Jesus takes a piece of unleavened bread, the bread eaten by Israel as they fled from Egypt, and breaks the bread, giving a piece to each present as a reminder not of a hurried exodus out of slavery in Egypt, but of the sacrifice he will make as the first born of God for release of all people from the slavery to sin and death. Jesus' body will be broken for our forgiveness. As Israel ate unleavened bread to remember the mighty hand of God that freed them from their bondage in Egypt, so we are to eat the unleavened bread to remember Jesus' death on the cross that redeems us from our sin.

Remember that darkness descends upon the site of the sacrifice of God's first-born son, just as Egypt was plunged into darkness for three days before the sacrifice of their first born. The death of God's first-born son leads to the transformation of all who come to believe in Jesus as their Lord and savior. God's first-born son dies and the people of God are given true freedom, freedom from sin and death.

The Passover was a great movement of God that Israel worked to remember and continue to practice so that all generations may know of God's actions and follow God. The Passover was an event that defined who the people of Israel were in each generation. It was a remembrance that pointed to something that was ongoing, God's steadfast love for His people. Jesus' actions make complete the Passover, revealing the true meaning of the ongoing nature of Israel's practice of Passover. Jesus' actions transform the Passover brought by the mighty hand of God at work to free His people from bondage in Egypt, to the mightiest act of a loving God redeeming of all of His people to a right relationship with Him, transforming God's people by belief into those who now live in the Kingdom of God. Israel would gather in Jerusalem each year to celebrate the Passover so that what God did for them might be remembered by all generations. We have been given a far greater gift, salvation. Our question is, will we take this good news to the children of God, those in the world who are waiting to hear that there is a God who loves them and a son who died for them that they might be set free from their sin and its consequence

of death? Will we go and tell those in the world whose cries we hear through the guidance of the Holy Spirit that God has answered their cry for help? Will we listen with hearts that are wide open to catch the pain and fear of those around us in the world, and when we hear their cry, go and love them, walk with them, nurture them, love them as Christ loves us, that they may become children of the living God? Rise up in the morning and begin your day in prayer asking God to enable us to hear the cry of one person we will meet that day and to give us each the courage to begin to walk with them and tell them about Jesus so that they may come to know how much God loves them.

Pray with me: Jesus, here we are safe in your loving arms, forgiven of our sin by the blood you shed and the life you gave for us. Lord, open our ears to hear and our eyes to see those on this mission field that you are asking us to go to and love into the kingdom of God. Help us all, Lord, to be strong and courageous and to be open to the guidance of the Spirit's leading. Come, Holy Spirit, come and guide us this day and every day that one more lost soul may come home. Amen