

## The Power of God - Exodus 7-11 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2012

'A plague of biblical proportions' Have you ever heard that phrase before? It brings up this idea of a huge, unstoppable swarm, something large with incredible power and uncontrollable. I did a quick search of plagues and perhaps one of the most well known is the Black Plague or the Bubonic plague in the 1300s which killed approximately 50 million people, which included one third of Europe's population, over the course of a couple of years. (historians may have to correct me later, I tried to find out a more exact figure, but unfortunately couldn't come up with a solid one). A more recent plague, the Spanish flu from around 1918 killed 20-40 million people.

Looking at these plagues here in Exodus, I realised that a number of these things seem to be more like natural disasters, the plague of hail for instance. We've seen the destruction that disasters like this bring on TV, earthquakes, cyclones, the tsunamis ... there is so much destruction that is caused during these events. Nature seems out of control and it destroys in an indiscriminate way.

Generally speaking, natural disasters are out of control.

But here in Exodus, we see that they are not out of control. They do cause immense destruction, but it is all contained by God's hand. You can see this by how the plagues affect the Egyptians differently to the Israelites. Nature itself is being used for a very specific purpose, for judgement, to show who the Lord is and to rescue the nation of the Israelites, who he now calls *his* people. These verses demonstrate how God is in *complete* control of what happens. It was true back then, and it is true today.

This distinction of who the plagues affect should really stand out for us. We sometimes miss it because it's such a familiar story. But I want to draw it out for us because I think it helps show something about God, something that we need to respond to, but I will get into that a little later.

But before we look at that let's set the context again.

We have seen the Israelite people have been living in a culture where they would have stood out in a way that would make life difficult for them. They worshipped one God, whereas the Egyptians had a whole collection of gods that they worshipped. The Pharaoh and the Egyptian people feared the numbers of the Israelites, they feared that they might join their enemies if it came to war, so they took pre-emptive action and enslaved them.

It's because of this oppression that the people cry out to the God of their forefathers, and God hears them and acts. He raises up Moses to speak to Pharaoh and to lead the

Israelites out of Egypt. Moses is uncertain at first about the call, but God reassures him and gives him signs to demonstrate to Pharaoh that the LORD, is the only true God. And why does God want to do this?

Chapter 7, Verse 4 and 5 – ‘I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgement I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it’

You want to know why the plagues happened? It’s not a random act, it’s not out of control. It’s right there, it’s God acting. He’s

- Judgement on Egypt
- Bringing *his* people out – the idea of rescue and salvation
- And that people, in this case the Egyptians, will know that he is the LORD. The one and only God.

Moses has already appeared to Pharaoh back in Chapter 5 and said those classic lines ‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says, let my people go’. Does Pharaoh listen? No. Pharaoh essentially goes ‘who? Get those Israelites back to work’. And initially things get tougher for the Israelites, and while it may have looked bad, it was still all in God’s control. It’s for God’s glory that things happened this way. The mighty acts of deliverance are about to begin.

In the meeting with Pharaoh and his magicians here at the beginning of chapter 8 it doesn’t seem to go too well. Aaron throws down his staff and it becomes a snake, just like God told him to. But then the magicians make a snake appear as well, using their ‘secret arts’ and Pharaoh remains unimpressed. After all his, magicians were just as good as Aaron. So he hardens his heart

Sometimes things have the appearance of being as good as, or as powerful as God. But that’s only an appearance. Do not be fooled by it.

For example we can sometimes think that we are in control and everything is okay when we have a secure job and a house to live in. But really that sense of control is only an illusion. We’ve seen in the news time and time again, examples of companies going under and people being made redundant, of bush fires destroying houses. We are clearly not in control. There is only one person in charge, and that is God. You see what happens here in Exodus to the magicians snakes? Aaron’s staff swallows up the other staffs.

We then start moving through the plagues – blood and frogs. Each time initially the magicians seem to be as powerful as Moses and God and can do the same things by their secret arts...but each time things happen to show they aren’t control. I love the fact that

with the frogs the magicians can make the frogs come up on the land, but Pharaoh has to call upon Moses to make the frogs go away. We know that God is sovereign and in control, and this is just another glimpse of how God is revealing his awesome nature to the Egyptians and Israelites.

Finally though we get to the point where the magicians are left behind. In our second reading we see that something else is going on entirely. With the plague of gnats, the magicians can't match it. They try, but they can't. They tell Pharaoh that these plagues are the 'finger of God' but Pharaoh refuses to submit to the command of God. His heart is hard.

Now God really starts flexing his power and showing that these are no random acts, that all these things are in his direct control. God says that he will 'deal differently' with the land of Goshen, where his people the Israelites are.

Remember how indiscriminate all the natural disasters and things we looked at the beginning of the sermon where? Well this is the same sort of scope, huge natural disasters, something that is going to happen over all of Egypt... except where God doesn't want it to. It's showing that God has complete control. It's showing that God is the only true God.

But it's not just control over the forces of nature; it's control even over Pharaoh's heart. I struggled with this a bit, the idea of is it fair that Pharaoh is punished if God is the one hardening his heart...but really we see that Pharaoh does have a choice. Moses tells pharaoh multiple times to let God's people go, and while God does 'harden his heart', you see there are times when pharaoh hardens his own heart. Pharaoh is completely responsible for his actions. This isn't the main point of the passage, but it continues to highlight the sovereignty that God has over everything.

#### Their response

The focus of these verses is very much on God, and Pharaoh responses. Remember what I said at the beginning, there are a couple of reasons for the plagues, judgement, to show that God is Lord of all, and to rescue his chosen people. Israel is pretty much a bit player in these verses. We will look at their response much more next week when we look at the Passover.

Now these promises of rescue and punishment, is specific to Israel then. We can't take the same idea of looking at natural disasters today, and seeing who they strike down and who they leave behind as an indicator of who God is rescuing or punishing. The only reason we can say that confidently here is because it is written in the bible.

But what should our response to the plagues be?

### Our response.

For us, at the most basic level I think we are meant to look at these plagues and see the might of God and be in awe of him. But just standing back in awe isn't all.

God's power shown here is so great, so earth shatteringly huge that it leaves a mark. It drives the nation of Egypt to its knees. It becomes a point in history that is a defining moment for Israel. This is something that should reach out and grab our hearts and our minds about how awesome God is.

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What is remarkable is the fact that God, the one and only true God, has also demonstrated his power and love again through his son.

Moses reintroduced God to the Israelites and to Egypt. Through Jesus, people also can know God. If you are righteous, right with God through Jesus, then you will be saved from judgement much more epic than the plagues written here. God will treat his people differently at the end of time. Not because of what they do, but because he has offered salvation through his son, Jesus.

You have choice. You can harden your heart to God like Pharaoh did. You can choose to ignore his word, his messages, his love. God speaks to people in different ways. It might be as epic as a natural disaster that shakes the very foundation of your worldview, or it might come through the words of a friend or neighbour. Either way, you have to realise that if you choose to ignore God, ignore the offer of rescue through Jesus, you will bear the full brunt of his power and judgment. There will be a time when God will again demonstrate his power through Jesus return. Revelation shows how huge armies arrayed against him are swept away in an instant. At that time there will be a difference in how people are treated. The question is will you be part of the family of Christ, part of the people that God has saved, by accepting Jesus as Lord?

If you have accepted Jesus as Lord, then rejoice! Know that God has saved you and praise his name! The challenge for me as I read this was to try and think of how God has changed my life, how his love and grace shown in my life is an ongoing reminder of the salvation that is promised.

In 1 Peter 2:9-10 says

“ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

This was said to people spread all over the roman empire, Jews and gentiles. It calls them a people of God. If we follow Christ, we are his people, and God *has* saved us. We *have* received mercy. So figure out how you can hold that truth in your heart at all times.

There will be moments in our life when things seem bleak. When they aren't getting better. But the promise is this; God is supremely powerful, he's in control, and he has promised that salvation has come through his son.

This might be something you hear a lot. And I wondered if I needed some other 'key point' to help people take something away from this passage. But I didn't have anything else, and I really think this is an essential truth that we need to be reminded of again and again, because the world around us constantly belittles God or tries to make him insignificant. And the world is wrong. God is big. God is powerful. Multiple times over this last week I have felt the urge to just go outside and look up and the vast empty sky.

I have been feeling very much confined and bogged down with things at work a bit, with study at uni, and it becomes so easy for me to live my life focused on a computer screen... but when I did go outside and look at the sky... I realised God is Big. God is everywhere. I stop in awe at the sheer size of creation, it makes me remember God and remember his promises and that he has the power to fulfil them all. It lifts my sight to what is truly important. Our father in heaven.

There will be tough times. Don't let them wipe you out. Remember those promises. Remember what God has done in your life. If there isn't anything you can think of in your own life, then look to the promises of the bible. God doesn't change. He is the same God today as the God who rescued his people through these mighty acts we looked at.

I hope that is one thing that you take with you today. If you aren't yet a follower of Jesus, if you aren't yet part of that family of God, then please ask Jesus to show you how. Chat to any of the ministry staff here at church. If you are someone who already knows that promise, then keep reminding yourself of God's awesome power, and how it isn't indiscriminate, but that God is in control of everything, and that he has chosen to bring people to know him.

Let's pray and lift our hearts and mind to God.

Our father in heaven, we stand in awe of what you have done. We see your control over all creation. Over the plants and animals, over the winds and rain, over life itself. We ask that you help us to see your hand in all of life so that we may give you glory. Thank you so much that we can be part of your family through Jesus, help us to keep this great truth in our hearts, always.

Amen.