

“The Death of the Firstborn”  
Exodus 11:1-10  
(Preached at Trinity, March 25, 2007)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. After nine terrible plagues that had left Egypt devastated Pharaoh still refused to humble himself before God.  
**Exodus 10:3** – “And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me.”
2. Last time we witnessed the plague of darkness – a darkness so thick it could be felt. There was absolutely no light upon the land.  
**Exodus 10:21** – “And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness *which* may be felt.”
3. The darkness lasted three days. People groped about in total darkness. It was particularly terrifying because they worshipped the sun.
  - A. Remember, the plagues upon Egypt were an assault upon their gods. God says, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”
  - B. They believed this solar deity Amon-Re was their creator. The sun affirmed the life giving power of Amon-Re.  
Pharaoh was considered the son of Re. He was the living representative of god.
  - C. God says, “I am the Creator.” There is no god but Me.
4. The ninth plague symbolizes the spiritual darkness of humanity. We were created in light, in the beauty of holiness dwelling in the light of the presence of God. With sin, however, we have fallen into total darkness—darkness so deep it can be felt.
5. One other point to note as we consider the darkness upon the land of Egypt. In **Verse 23 of Chapter 10** we read, “but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.”
  - A. The land of Goshen was filled with light. Brightness covered the land. We have to assume that at some point between Egypt and Goshen there was a sudden change from total darkness to wonderful light. All the Egyptians had to do was leave the darkness and enter the light.
  - B. What a picture of Christ. Jesus is the true light.  
**John 1:6-9** – “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all *men* through him might believe. <sup>8</sup> He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. <sup>9</sup> *That* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

- C. Why didn't the Egyptians flee the darkness of Egypt? Because of the evil of their hearts.  
**John 3:19-21** – “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. <sup>21</sup> But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”
6. As we enter **Chapter 11** we find the 10<sup>th</sup> and final plague, the most devastating plague of all.
- The people of Egypt had suffered from severe thirst as the water of the land had turned to blood and then the terrible infestation of frogs.
  - They had suffered the biting stinging insects.
  - Most of their cattle had either died from disease or were crushed in the hail storm.
  - They had suffered terrible oozing boils.
  - The hail storm flattened their crops, ruined their trees, and caused much damage upon their dwellings.
  - Locusts had devoured what vegetation remaining after the hail storm.
  - Darkness left them sightless for three days
7. Even through all of this Pharaoh refused to turn. Even though God had clearly demonstrated that He had absolute power Pharaoh still pretended that he was in full control—even over life and death.  
**Exodus 10:28** – “And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in *that* day thou seest my face thou shalt die.
8. As God brings this final plague upon Egypt He reveals several things about Himself.
- I. God is the God of absolute and sovereign power
- A. God was about to prove that He had the ultimate power over life and death.
1. God was about to bring great sorrow upon every household as the firstborn of Egypt were smitten dead.”  
**Exodus 11:4-6** – “And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: <sup>5</sup> And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that *is* behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. <sup>6</sup> And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more.”
  2. Like the other plagues some supposed Bible scholars have sought to explain the plague using natural causes. Their explanations become almost amusing.
    - a. Some say the plagues were caused by volcanic activity. The boils were caused by hot ash hitting the skin. The volcano sent forth poison gas and since the first born slept closest to the floor they were overcome by the fumes.
    - b. Others say the food became contaminated and since the firstborn ate first they were poisoned and died.
    - c. None of this explains how even the livestock died.

3. This plague cannot be explained naturally. It was a supernatural act of God. He went through Egypt and took the life of all of the firstborn.  
**Psalms 135:8** – “Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast.”

B. Once again, this plague was an assault upon their gods.

**Exodus 12:12** – “For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LORD.”

1. The Egyptians were obsessed with death and the afterlife. They spend great sums and gave great attention to preparation for the afterlife. Mummies still exist today.
2. The gods of the dead were Osiris and Anubis.
  - a. Anubis supervised the embalming process.
  - b. Anubis took a canine form which may explain the reference dogs in **Verse 7** – “But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.”
3. The Israelites were untouched by death proving that the Egyptian gods of death had no power over them. Jehovah is the God over life and death.
4. Pharaoh’s son was a successor to the gods. He was the prince in line to become the next Pharaoh and the next deity. God is a jealous God and will not allow rivals.

II. God is a God of justice

A. Some might presume that God is acting with cruelty here

1. The firstborn throughout the land are all killed from the lowest slave girl to Pharaoh himself. Some accuse God of harshness
2. This is because of an inaccurate understanding of God. Too many today see God as a benevolent old gentleman that gives lollipops to all. They see Him as love, love, love who functions with gentleness and kindness to all without distinction.
3. This view of God fails to understand that God while God has infinite love and while He *has* showered humanity with goodness He is also a God of perfect, absolute justice.

B. God made a covenant with Adam who served as our representative

1. In this covenant God promised life for obedience and death for disobedience
2. Adam sinned and all the earth is suffering the consequences – this is just. Sickness, disease, famine, pestilence – all are just consequences

C. God gave Pharaoh a command

**Exodus 5:1** – “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.”

1. God’s commands are not to be ignored – God will not be ignored  
He demands all men to honor His great name.

**Exodus 10:2** – “And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I *am* the LORD.”

2. Pharaoh's response was immediate and definite  
**Exodus 5:2** – "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go."
3. God is perfect in holiness and all of His actions are perfect in holiness
4. Pharaoh rebelled against God  
God says, "obey." Pharaoh says, "I will not obey"
5. Pharaoh got exactly what he deserved – death

D. What about everyone else in Egypt?

1. There are temporal judgments upon the earth
2. Sometimes individuals are judged on the earth – it should cause the unbelieving to face each day with fear.
3. Nations are also judged temporally – they rise and fall according to their honor of God – this should cause our nation to tremble.  
618,000 Americans died in the Civil War
4. All of the Egyptians were idolaters
5. And God had not forgotten that Israel had suffered greatly under the cruelty of the Egyptians  
**Exodus 3:7** – "And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;"  
**Exodus 11:6** – "And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt"  
a. The word for "cry" is the same in both passages  
b. This is justice

III. God is a God of mercy

- A. God was merciful in giving warning
  1. God was not obligated to give Pharaoh warning
  2. Pharaoh had God's natural revelation of Himself. This should have been sufficient to demand Pharaoh's reverence.  
**Romans 1:20** – "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:"
  3. God could have sent judgment upon Pharaoh without warning.
    - a. In mercy God warned Pharaoh over and over
    - b. Over and over Pharaoh denied God
- B. God was merciful in limiting the severity of His judgments
  1. The plagues grew progressively worse in severity
  2. As devastating as the plagues were, they were not as severe as they could have been and they were not as severe as the Egyptians deserved
  3. Even the death of the firstborn was not as severe as they deserved
    - a. It brought great anguish upon the land  
**Exodus 11:6** – "And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt"
    - b. It was the worst disaster ever to fall upon Egypt  
**Exodus 11:6** – "such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more."

- c. But it wasn't as severe as they deserved  
In reality, they all deserved to die.  
The wages of sin is death – this is what we all deserve.
  - 4. Even the promise that it would never be repeated is an act of mercy – but it is temporal mercy.
  - 5. Judgment is postponed, but only temporarily.  
The question is not *if* we are going to die, but *when*
- C. All of our comforts upon this earth are by mercy
  - 1. All suffering is merciful in its severity – no suffering is as severe as we deserve.
  - 2. Hell will be the ultimate expression of God's justice
    - a. All sinners will be righteously condemned
    - b. Hell will be a place of unimaginable torment – and it will never end – this is just – It is God's justice.

Conclusion:

- 1. What God demanded from Pharaoh is the same thing He demands of all men. He demands that we be sorry for our sins. This is true repentance.
  - A. There were several times that Pharaoh turned from his sin – he had had enough of the misery and pledged obedience. But every time he returned to his disobedience.
  - B. What Pharaoh was lacking was sorrow for his sin. What he was lacking was a submission to God and a remorse that he had ever offended God.
  - C. Refusal to submit to God will always result in His judgment. God is perfectly just.
- 2. God demands that we forsake our sin and turn to Him through Jesus Christ.  
God gives mercy to those who repent.