

The Final Plague

Exodus

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Bible Text: Exodus 11:1-10
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Let's read Exodus 11:1 through 10.

1 The LORD said to Moses, "Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will drive you away completely. 2 Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, for silver and gold jewelry." 3 And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people. 4 So Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: 'About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, 5 and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle. 6 There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again. 7 But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.' 8 And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, 'Get out, you and all the people who follow you.' And after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. 9 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." 10 Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

This is God's word.

Father, would you open our eyes this morning that we may understand better the living God, the holy God, the righteous God, not just your attribute of love but to know that you are a God who is slow to anger but just because you are slow doesn't mean you never get there, and that you are not a God to be trifled with. Lord, unless you help us, we will

have a puny God in our minds so help us to see a great, majestic, glorious God as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

We have just watched a video of a swarm of devouring locusts and I think, you know, just in watching that, I think you might agree it would be a pretty serious problem for a swarm of locusts to come upon a community, upon a land, and devour all the vegetation. I mean, just seeing these creepy things crawling around and flying through the air en masse is unnerving, but God had said, "I will bring locusts into your country," and that's what he did, one of the plagues. Today, however, we will be looking at a far more deadly plague. I want you to just see this video because it's just a sample of one of the plagues, but our focus today is going to be upon a far more deadly plague, a far more unnerving, a far more unsettling. We've seen so far that God is deeply committed to delivering his people from Egyptian slavery that they might serve him and him alone. In their bondage, they cried out to God and he heard their cry and we sang just a moment ago, "He heard my cry." He heard the cry of these desperate people, not perfect people, in fact, people with failures just like you and I, but as we sang a moment ago, "Who else can rescue me from my failures?" I love that line. Who else could? Only a holy God.

I want you to know today before we go any further that today in 2018, slavery is still real. Now I'm not talking about the horrible slavery of the 1800s that continued into the 20th century. I'm not talking about that kind of slavery, I'm talking about the kind of bondage that grips a man or a woman no matter what color they may be, no matter what their educational status may be, no matter what their economic status may be; I'm talking about the bondage, for example, the bondage to pleasure, being addicted and enslaved to one pleasure after another. I'm talking about bondage to sexual confusion; bondage to opioid addiction; bondage to the pain of the past. I spoke with a young man this week, he is so enslaved and so much in bondage to the pain of his past, the severe upbringing under what appear to be horrible parents, and he still carries it today as he tries to raise his four-year-old boy, and I want you to know today in 2018, that if that's you, whatever slavery, whatever addiction, whatever bondage, know that God hears the cry of humble needy people. He does. He cares deeply about people who are humble and needy and cry out and say, "God, help me!" And he will help you. He is able and willing to help you. Know that today. Don't look at these passages today as being some old dusty story, understand that the same God lives today and delivers today. He can help you.

Now you'll notice that, once again, Pharaoh has refused to let the people go. He has been stubborn, he has been defiant, he has been rebellious, and what you should see here, don't miss this, rebellion against God is not going to end good. You should be tracking with this. You might be 15, 20 or 32, or 70. I hope you're tracking with me, rebellion against God does not end well at all. God strikes Pharaoh and the Egyptians with plagues and we have not looked at each plague in particular, we looked a little bit at some of them but we will look today at one, the final plague, the death of the firstborn. These are, let's just admit this up front, these are very troubling passages for any thoughtful person. If you're not a thoughtful person, you don't know, and I say this with all tenderness, if you're not a thoughtful person and you don't know how to listen to a sermon, this may not have much impact upon you, but if you're a thoughtful person and you're focusing upon what we've

read and what we're looking at, these are troubling passages. They bring up some really good legitimate questions so I'd like to help us this morning to work through some of that, if I may.

I want to break this down into three things and the first thing is this, I want us to see this together, okay, I want us to see God judging. Now I know through the past few weeks as we worked our way through this book, we've talked a little bit about the judgment of God, but if I may, I want us to just, once again, see God judging. Look at verse 5 with me, please, "and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle." Now you do see what's happening here, no matter whether you are popular or unpopular, no matter whether you're rich or whether you're poor, all of the firstborn are going to die. Then notice the ramifications of just this awareness, when it happens. Look at verse 6, this is chilling, "There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again." You know, these folks will wake up, God is forecasting they're going to wake up and they're going to find their firstborn child dead. It's not been coming on, it's not been an illness coming on, it's going to be a sudden death. So, first, what is meant by firstborn and what is the significance of the firstborn? In other words, why did God choose to do this instead of saying, "I'm going to take your youngest child or I'm going to take your spouse?" Why does he zero in on the firstborn?

So first, what is meant by firstborn, and generally speaking it means the first from the womb whether human or animal, generally speaking, the first from the womb, but I want us to focus primarily on humans rather than animals, and so firstborn regarding humans specifically means the eldest son of the father. The eldest son, not the eldest daughter, the eldest son of the father. In particular, God has focused upon taking the life of the eldest son in the family. The firstborn not only was the first born from the womb but the first one also held the preeminence among the family offspring since they were the first to ensure the existence of the family into the next generation. Now think about it, that firstborn has a position of prominence, preeminence. Why? Because this is going to be the son that is going to carry the existence of the family into the next generation.

Now let's stop here for a moment. Okay, firstborn, eldest son. Now let's be clear here. Let's don't leave any ambivalence. Let's be clear: God is going to take the life of all the firstborn of Egypt. Just let that land on you for a moment. Now you might be inclined to say, "No, nah, the death angel did it." Hold your place and look at the very next chapter, chapter 12 in verse 23. Now, we're going to look at chapter 12 next week but I want you to look at one verse, verse 23, "For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you." Now some read that verse and say, "Well, it was the death angel that did it," as if that somehow gets God off the hook so God doesn't look like that he's the one who took the lives, but did you notice how that verse began, did you see it? "For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians." And then also notice in our text verse 4, "Thus says the LORD:

'About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die.'" Let's be clear: this is God taking the life of every firstborn in Egypt.

Now, I can hear someone say, "I don't like this. I don't like this." It's a bit unsettling, isn't it? I mean, especially if the God that you have come up with in your mind is nothing but love, love, love, love, he loves everything and loves everybody and he has no distinctions, if that's what you've got going on, then this really is unsettling. So you say, "I don't think I like this." I don't know how many of you stay up with this sort of thing but most of you probably have heard of the ministry of Charles Stanley, his son, Andy Stanley, pastors a mega church in Georgia. He's been in some significant hot water over the last few years, especially as of late. He has recommended that, his words, we should unhitch ourselves from the Old Testament. Here was his sentence, he says among much he had to say about this and I won't go into all of it but he said, "When it comes to stumbling blocks to the faith, the Old Testament is right up there at the top of the list." His recommendation to other pastors and to Christians is we would serve ourselves better to unhitch ourselves from the Old Testament because of things like this, because of troubling things like this and many others. He said it's an obstacle. If we talk about things like this, if we read things like this, if we expound things like this, it's going to really cause confusion. It's going to be a stumbling block for people coming to faith in Christ.

Then there are others who not only want to unhitch from the Old Testament, they want to unhitch from God altogether. They would say things like, "Look, if that's the God you serve, I don't want nothing to do with him." Now let me ask a question, if that's you, that's somebody you know, would you want to be judged, would you want your life to be judged by one frame, say, one segment of your life? Would you want all of your life to be judged on that one frame, that one segment, that one year, that one decade even? Now you probably wouldn't. You'd probably say, "That's not fair. I mean, just that one isolated thing to judge me, no." We'd probably say no, and so is it fair for us to judge God that way? Is it fair for us to look at this and go, "Well, I don't want nothing to do with God. If God like that, I don't want anything to do with him." Is it fair? I don't think so. We wouldn't want that. You see, I have found this: the better my understanding of God becomes, the more I look into the Scriptures not into my head, not into my heart, the more I look into the word of God where God has revealed himself, I find that the more I understand him and the more comprehensive picture, passages such as this I'm able to deal with better. If all I look at is just this and I hear it and I go, "I'm done with God. I don't like a God like that," you need to understand that you are jettisoning, you are dumping the living God, so you'd better find another way of dealing with this and the best way is to get a more fuller, more comprehensive understanding of God from his word.

So first, God is judging here and he is taking the life of every firstborn in Egypt. 2. Let's look for a moment at God being judged. You see, the Scriptures do not offer a defense of God's right to do this. Moses doesn't stop in chapter 11 and say, "Now, I know you're a little upset with this, I know this is difficult, I know this bothers you, I know you don't like to see God like this, so let me explain." He doesn't do that. He doesn't offer any, the Bible doesn't offer a defense of God for his right to take life when he wants to take it, and for me, I'm just going to speak for me, that is a very powerful reason for why I believe

the Bible is true. You see, if this book is a phony and a fake, most of the time we would try, if we were writing it we would try to make God look good. He would shine in every scene. He'd be the guy on the white horse and the white hat all the time. We'd never put God in this light here and I think that's a powerful reason for me why I believe the Bible is true. God is willing to say, "Look, this is it. This is reality." The reality is he's taking the life of every firstborn in Egypt, and for some this incident raises some concern about the character of God.

Here's some of the things that we hear. Why is it okay for God to do this but not for us? You see, it sounds something like this, it sounds like God's ticked off at these Egyptians, God's got mad, they've dissed him, he's gonna show them. He take them out. So we might say, "Wait a minute, we don't have the privilege to do that. We've got to wait on God and let him repay. Why can't we do that? Why is God doing something we can't do?" And see, we mentioned this a few weeks ago, when we say that, we have committed the fallacy of moral equivalency. Moral equivalency is when we draw a false comparison between two things that are not morally equivalent. Let's say for example right now, probably some of you, you have a dog at home and for some of you it may be in a cage while you're away so it doesn't mess up the house. Let's say someone comes to you and says, "You know, you're a sick person, keeping a dog as a pet is every bit as evil as human slavery." And you go, "What? That's not equivalent. That's not equal." Right? Or how many of you, some of you have a mustache, let's say, here's the way, they come and they say, "That Adolf Hitler, he was an evil man. He had a mustache, you've got a mustache, you must be an evil person." That's the error of moral equivalency and we hear that a lot in public discourse. You see, the assumption is we think God and humanity are just alike. For instance, we just sang a moment ago, "Only a holy God." Who can do the things that we sang about this morning? Can we do them? Can I rescue me from my failures? Can I rescue you from your failures? I can't, only a holy God. God stands out as unique and distinct beyond and above his creation, so what's okay for God is certainly not always okay for us sinful creatures.

Second thing someone would object this way, but God doesn't, but doesn't God command "thou shalt not murder? Thou shalt not kill?" That would be an objection for somebody to look at this story and they go, "Your God is just randomly killing people and later he's going to give the command 'thou shalt not murder,' which is a prohibition against taking innocent human life." I mean, if you were at Christmas dinner and you brought and you said, "After I read the Christmas story, I would like to read Exodus 11," and you read that in the presence of some unbelieving family members and they're gonna go, "Oh! You see, that's, you serve a God like that? Didn't that God say 'thou shalt not kill? Thou shalt not murder'?" What do you say to them? You see, here's where we must not lose sight. It's very easy, you're sitting there and they say, "Didn't God say 'thou shalt not murder'? God's murdering?" Don't lose sight. You see, when we get to chapter 11, it's easy for us to forget what happened in chapter 1. You say, "What happened in chapter 1?" Pharaoh ordered the genocide, the killing of Israelite male babies, so stop there and just at least admit this, there's no innocency here. "Thou shalt not murder" is thou shalt not take innocent life, and what God is doing here, he's not dealing with innocent people. Furthermore, God considered the Israelites his firstborn, so what you should see is that

Pharaoh and Egypt have abused God's firstborn, now God will bring judgment upon their firstborn.

So what should you see here in chapter 11? You should see this: God brings judgment eventually. In chapter 1 it must have looked like to the people of God, "God, what are you doing? Why are you letting this happen for? Stop this!" When we get to chapter 11 and we begin to see the hammer coming down because God brings judgment eventually. You see, some who are listening to me right now, some might hold the belief of nothingness after death. I talk to people often, I'll say, "What do you think happens after you die?" And they say, "Nothing. Nothing. You just die and that's it." And I'm like, you know, what comfort does a person like that have in light of all the betrayal, the greed, the injustice, the murders? What comfort do they have that these things are going to be judged? If you just die and there's nothing, all the wrongs are just left hanging, there's no comfort in that. No, real comfort comes from believing in life after death with a righteous compassionate God who ultimately repays.

And by the way, if you're still not convinced, if you're still sitting there judging God, saying, "I just don't like this," just remember God gave these people space to repent. There were ten plagues, not one. I mean, you'd think, you'd think that after these locusts were crawling up your britches' leg, you'd think after you spent time in utter darkness, you'd think, you'd think that there would be people saying, "Forgive me!" There's been space to repent but instead of repentance, there was nothing but more defiance.

Timothy McVeigh, in 1995 he was responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing and he was sentenced to death just as he should have been and before he died he said this, "If I go to hell, I'm gonna have a lot of company there." No repentance, only defiance. No repentance in light of death, only rebellion.

Brothers and sisters, I hope you see in Exodus 11 we have for us an historic example of what happens when a person lives a defiant rebellious life going against the grain of a righteous God. It does not end well.

So we don't end on a dark note, let us end on a bright note and let's take a moment to look at God's firstborn. We've been looking at firstborn. God takes the life of all the firstborn in Egypt and the result is death and wailing and horror. In our text, there's a strange verse that I want to draw your attention to in verse 7. It doesn't seem like it fits here, "But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel." I want you to see a picture of the Egyptian god of the dead, Osiris. It's not an attractive picture. This is one of the phony fake gods of the Egyptians that they were serving during this time. Osiris was the Egyptian god of the dead. But then an even more unattractive picture is his assistant, Anubis, the god of the underworld. Anubis supervised, it was believed to be, it was believed that Anubis supervised the embalming process and guided the dead during their passage to the afterlife. I show you these pictures because you notice that Anubis has the head of a dog. Now I can't say 100% for certain, and I'm indebted to a man named Philip Ryken for pointing this out, why would verse 7 say, "But not a dog shall growl against

any of the people of Israel"? And perhaps it is this: God is saying that the Israelites, his firstborn, would remain untouched by death, proving that the false god of Anubis held no power over them. Isn't that interesting? Because you see, God is pouring out these plagues not just upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians but he's also serving judgment upon the false gods of Egypt. He's saying, "I am the Lord. These false gods have no power over my people, not even a dog shall growl."

Now let me try to turn toward home. This distinction that God is making between his people and the Egyptians, was this merely a distinction between good and bad people? Notice when we read this, should we go, "The Egyptians, bad people, bad. Israelites, good people. That's why God protected them, they were good people." Now, next week when we come back, Lord willing, you'll be here and we'll look at chapter 12 and we'll answer that issue, is this distinction because they're good or bad people. Today, here's what I want you to think about, I think we'd all agree that death comes to both good and bad people. Just yesterday, George Bush Sr. died. Now I've read a considerable amount about George Bush and I know that in the political world we hear all kinds of different things, different parties, you know, different things are said and very unkind, but I've read a great deal about George Bush and I'll tell you this: he was a good man. He was a good man. He was not a perfect man. Oh no, he had his flaws and failures like we do. He was a good man, and what I'm saying is this, death comes to what we would consider good people and bad people, and the reason is because we are all sinners. Romans 5, let me read this, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."

So whether good or bad, this morning, since death will one day come for us, what hope do we have in death? I want you to focus on this, one last question: what hope do we have in death, and I want to propose to you the answer is God's firstborn. It's amazing the number of passages in the New Testament where it speaks of Jesus Christ as the firstborn. I want to look at one of them in Colossians 1:15, "He," that would be Jesus, "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." I want you to look at that verse closely and I want you to listen to me very carefully: some falsely assume on the basis of that verse that Jesus was a created being. Now listen, I need for you to listen very closely because some of you may be in error and here's why. Just this year LifeWay Christian Bookstore and Ligonier Ministries went together to do a survey among evangelicals. Horrific findings. The church in 2018 is doctrinally in deep trouble and one of the reasons is because 73% of evangelicals hold, that 7 out of 10 believe this quote, "Jesus is the first greatest being created by God." And some of you may be looking at me and thinking, "Well, doesn't that verse say the firstborn of all creation?" Let me make it clear, let me just say really clear right now: Jesus was not created, he is the eternal Son of God. He was not created. If you think he was, you don't have much hope in that kind of Jesus. You see, some would look at that verse and say, "Well, doesn't that say that?" No, it doesn't because if you see it that way you're failing to recognize that the meaning of the term "firstborn" depends upon the context it is used in. The Greek term can refer, yes, to either the birth order in the family which we just talked about, but, listen, it can also refer to a special status conferred upon someone meaning they have preeminence, and they have

first place among contenders. In other words, firstborn is not isolated to just meaning first born or first created, it means preeminence also, and this verse proves it.

In Colossians 1:18, just a couple of verses later here's what it says, "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead," we'll look at that in a moment, "that in everything he might be preeminent." If you sit here this morning and you say, "Well, I believe, yeah, I guess I believe that Jesus was a created being." Then notice what it says there, "the firstborn from the dead." Now I want you to pay attention. If you mistakenly think that Jesus is a created being, I want to help you, because it also says he's the firstborn from the dead, and we know that Jesus was not the first person to rise from the dead. No, we know that Elijah raised the widow of Zarephath's son, and Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. So when it says that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead, it's something much bigger than just somebody coming back from the dead. No, it means that Jesus holds first place, he holds preeminence among all who have or ever will be raised from the dead because of what his resurrection accomplished and provides. No, Jesus is not a created being. When it says he's the firstborn, he's preeminent, he's the first, he's the first and the greatest among all contenders for he said in John 11, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." Do you believe this? Jesus offers life to those who trust in him. What kind of life? A life that even earthly death cannot take away.

Let me close with this. In Exodus 11, firstborn of Egypt all die. Death. The smell of death, the horror of death all the way through Exodus 11. What about those of us who will one day face our own death? What is our hope? Our hope is in the firstborn, Jesus. How? Because God sent his Son, the preeminent one, the one who had first place, the one who is first in order. Now think about you're preeminent, you're first in order, but you come as Jesus did and you humble yourself and you lay aside your glory and you take on the form of a servant in the likeness of sinful human flesh, and you bear the judgment of God in the place of sinners, and then on the third day you are raised from the dead that you might be the firstborn from the dead, the firstborn of God's new creation, the firstborn, the Scriptures say, among many brothers who have believed. So do you believe this? That's what Jesus is asking you, do you believe this? If you do, if you do, this will be a most certain hope in both life and death because, friends, make no mistake about it, God has all power over life and death. Our only hope as we face death is God's firstborn, Jesus.