

Chiang Mai Community Church
19 July 2010
Exodus # 5 “Lifting the Veil: the Self Revelation of our Amazing God
Judgment and Mercy of God
Exodus 11- 13

1 Setting the Scene

Last week, Pastor Rupert gave us an overview of the 10 plagues of Egypt. He highlighted the battle that went on between Pharaoh and the God of Israel

Each plague can be seen to represent a battle between a god or goddess of Egypt and the one true and only God, who calls himself, “I Am Who I Am”, who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3), when Moses was commissioned by God to “bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt”

So the battle commenced!

With each plague the God “ups the anti” – increases the pressure.

The 9th plague saw one of the chief Egyptian deities, Ra, the Sun god, pitched against the God of Israel. Who was the greater, Ra or Yahweh? The answer was plain to all – Egypt was plunged into darkness, but the Israelites were bathed in light. Negotiations were well advanced to let the Israelites go, but Pharaoh refused to let them take their livestock – essential for food and for the sacrifices they were to perform. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart – you could say God left him to himself, to what he wanted. In the midst of pitch darkness, he said to Moses – “Get out of my sight! Make sure you don’t appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die.” It’s almost comical, seeing it was black out conditions. But before Moses left, he announced the last and most devastating plague.....

2 The Big Showdown

So (roll of drums) we come to the big showdown (Read Exodus Chap 11)

We’ve had all the preliminaries: the lesser gods and goddesses were blown away by Yahweh, the God of Israel. Now the contest is between the Ultimate Power of Egypt, Pharaoh, the greatest Egyptian god, and the all powerful Yahweh.

For the past 80 years, the successive Pharaohs have systematically oppressed the Israelites, putting them into slavery and generally perpetrating horrendous cruelty. This latest Pharaoh in his dealings with Moses, has done all he can to put his own purposes first and to confound and frustrate God’s purposes. After 9 plagues, he is still unwilling to repent and do what God has asked. So the time has come for God to act!

Ps 78: 49 He unleashed against them his hot anger, his wrath, indignation and hostility--a band of destroying angels.

God is full of righteous anger at Pharaoh’s evil and wicked ways, and his judgment is directed where it will hurt most. In killing the first born sons, not only is the successor to Pharaoh, the supreme god of Egypt, killed, but the dreams and plans of every father, the line of inheritance, are stopped dead, literally. Moses storms out, hot with anger, angry because of the unprecedented suffering and grief that would follow, all because of Pharaoh’s evil and stubbornness.

At midnight, on the 15th day of the month, God executes his judgment on an evil, corrupt and unrepentant regime.

Exodus 12: 29-30 At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

The judgment of God is done. God cannot abide evil and he tries to find all ways possible to help people turn from their evil ways. Later, God describes himself in these words:

Exodus 34: 6-7 “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”

God gave Pharaoh many opportunities to let his people go, but in the end, Pharaoh closed the door on God. The battle could only have one outcome – God triumphed, Pharaoh lost.

3 The Judgment of God

I find judgment is a hard concept to come to terms with, especially when we think of God being a God of love. Who does he judge and punish people?

I think that the judgment of God needs to be put into its proper context. The context of a God who is holy, set apart, totally perfect and who does no wrong and cannot abide evil and wrongdoing in any shape or form. He is long suffering, but in the end, in the face of unrepentant and evil people, he has to act. And this happened not once but many times.

The people of Israel, after God rescued them from slavery, continually failed to live up to God's standard God. Ps 78 (v 8) talks about, “a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.” We only need to look at the disastrous episode with the golden calf to see how quickly the people turned away from God when Moses' back was turned, so to speak.

Much later in the Old Testament, God's judgment on Israel was to abandon them to their enemies. He speaks through Jeremiah:

JER 12:7 "I will forsake my house, abandon my inheritance; I will give the one I love into the hands of her enemies.

JER 25:8 - 9 Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the LORD, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.

The judgment of God on a disobedient, unrepentant, wicked people is frightening and horrendous.

It's all rather heavy for a hot, sticky evening, isn't it?

4 The Mercy of God

This is but one side of our God, who must judge because he cannot abide evil. But the defining characteristic of our God is love. His strong desire is to have a relationship with people, not to dish out retribution. **Relationship rather than retribution.** He is a God of mercy, kind and always ready to forgive, patient and long suffering. **It's hard to understand these two apparently contradictory characteristics of God: a God of Judgment and a God of Mercy.**

It's a bit like this sign seen at convent in Baltimore. It read, "Trespassers will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law". Underneath it was signed, "the Sisters of Mercy".

In Exodus, God hears the cry of his people and sends Moses to lead them out of Egypt. Out of his great mercy, he provides a way by which they can be saved. He protects them from the "destroyer". The instructions given to Moses and Aaron for the Passover meal were very precise (Exod 12:1-11)

1. 10th day of the month Abib
2. Head of household selects a one year old male lamb, without defect
3. Slaughtered at twilight on the 14th day
4. Put blood on doorframes of houses
5. The lamb oasted whole with bitter herbs
6. Eaten with unleavened bread
7. Must burn the leftovers
8. Eat in haste and with expectancy – cloak tucked in belt ready to run, sandals on (not the done thing indoors!) and with walking staff in hand, ready to leave.
9. Followed by seven days of eating only unleavened bread

Did you get all that? And here's what follows:

EX 12:12 "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn--both men and animals--and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. 13 The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, **I will pass over you.** No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

The one year old Passover lamb "without defect" takes the place of Israel's first born males who would otherwise be killed. They are saved by the blood of the lamb on the doorframes.

Moses instructs the people (Exod12:21-27a) in what God has told him. And what is the response of the Israelites?

Exod 12:27b-28 Then the people bowed down and worshipped. The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.

A people who later in their wanderings in the wilderness became rebellious and disobedient, started off in worship and obedience. I find that quite amazing. I am sure

my reaction would have been, “Why must I do all these things? There seems no point.” **With our holy, all powerful, perfect God, you don’t need to ask why, you just need to trust him and obey him. “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way.....”**

The result of their obedience is God leads them out of Egypt, saved from slavery.

Exod 13:21 By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

God not only saved the Israelites but guided them on their way. As Christians, isn’t it wonderful how God saves us and then guides us on our way, too? If only we would look for our pillars of cloud and fire!

5 The Cross of Christ

For us who live under the New Covenant, the Passover points clearly to the Cross, where Jesus died **“For us”**.

1 Cor 15:3-4: for what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ died for our sins** according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

At the cross, Jesus’ blood saved us from the destruction and led us out of our slavery to sin into the freedom of the eternal “Promised Land”, eternal life in relationship with God.

I’ve been reading Chris Wright’s book “The God I don’t Understand”. And it’s challenged me to think more deeply about God’s mercy and love.

He asks why did God love the Israelites? A lot is said in the Bible about why Israel should love God, but nothing is ever explained about why God loved Israel.

- It wasn’t because they were an important people: in reality, they were rather a small nation.
- It wasn’t because he was their special Israelite God: because he’s the God of every nation
- It wasn’t because they were more righteous than other nations: they were a stubborn bunch and actually got worse!

The fact is God loved Israel because he loved them. The love of God for the Israelites came from within God himself. Only God knows the reason – the Bible does not say. **It is completely amazing.**

The persistent love of God for Israel concentrates in one story the much larger love of God for the whole human race. And it was this love that would ultimately lead to the cross. **God’s love for the whole world is equally as amazing as God’s love for Israel.**

We are made in God’s image, to love God, love one another and to care for the earth, yet in many ways, we often deface God’s image and dethrone God himself. God in his patient love, dealt with the sins of Israel all through the Old Testament, and God, in his infinite love, dealt with the sins of the whole world on the cross.

Jesus died **for us**. Why – **Because God loves us**. This is biblical, true and our human minds can't explain it.

Jesus interpreted his own death as a fulfilment of the Passover sacrifice. Matt 26:28
"This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

The sacrifice of the lambs spared the lives of the firstborn sons of Israel on the night of the Exodus. The blood of the Passover lambs was "**for them**"

Jesus' action was "**for us**", but his words made it plain he himself was that sacrifice, with his own body and blood.

On the cross, God in Christ put himself in our place for our benefit. This is the core reality of the cross. God chose to put himself in a place where we should be, to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. In the Alpha Course, Nicky Gumbel puts it this way:

"Two people went through school and university together. Life went on and they went their separate ways and lost contact. One went on to become a judge and the other ended up a criminal. One day the criminal appeared before the judge. He had committed a crime and pleaded guilty. The judge recognised his old friend and faced a dilemma. He was a judge so he had to be just; he couldn't let the man off. On the other hand he didn't want to punish the man because he loved him. So he told his friend that he would fine him the correct penalty for the offence. **That is justice**. Then he came down from his position as a judge and wrote a cheque for the amount of the fine. He gave it to his friend saying he would pay the penalty for him. **That is love.**"

Nicky goes on to say, "This is an illustration of what God has done for us. He is both just (he does not let the guilty go unpunished) and the one who justifies (by taking the penalty himself in the person of his Son, he enables us to go free). He is both our judge and our saviour. God himself saves us. He gives us a cheque and we have a choice – do we want him to pay it for us by putting our trust in him as our saviour or will we face his judgement for our wrong doing?"

I don't know about you, but I sometimes find it hard to believe that God loves me unconditionally, that as a Christian, I am no longer under his judgment but I am saved by his loving mercy and grace. I then need to remind myself that I am no longer a sinner, trying to escape his anger and judgment, but I am his dear child. I know I sometimes make wrong choices and sin, but when I turn back to him, he forgives me.

ONLY BY GRACE can we enter,
Only by grace can we stand;
Not by our human endeavour,
But by the blood of the Lamb.
Into Your presence You call us,
You call us to come.
Into Your presence You draw us,
And now by Your grace we come,
Now by Your grace we come.

Lord, if You mark our transgressions,
Who would stand?
Thanks to Your grace we are cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb.

What a wonderful God we worship! Thanks be to God!