

"SET APART"

I. Introduction

A. Last week we noted that the ten plagues that preceded Israel's deliverance from Egypt are structured in three groups of three, with the tenth plague as the climax toward which the first nine build.

1. The ten plagues get progressively worse.
2. And the third plague in each triad comes without any warning.
3. All of this shows that God was using the plagues to show Pharaoh his need to relent and let Israel go.
4. But instead of doing that, Pharaoh kept on hardening his heart.

B. Another thing that we noted last week is that each of the three plague triads has a particular point of emphasis.

1. In the first triad, the emphasis was upon God's complete sovereignty over the land of Egypt.
2. Here in the second triad, the emphasis is upon the distinction that God makes between the people of Egypt and the people of Israel.
3. It is explicitly stated that these three plagues only affected the Egyptians.
4. This points ahead to what takes place in the last plague, where God provides a way for his people to be spared from the plague on the firstborn.
5. As we study Moses' account of these three plagues today, I want us to see how they teach us three things about the church's identity as the people whom God sets apart for

himself.

6. The church is set apart for worship.
7. The church is set apart for protection.
8. And the church is set apart for victory.

II. Set Apart for Worship

- A. We begin by looking at the account of the plague of flies, where we see that the church is set apart for worship.
 1. This plague is introduced in the same way that the first plague was introduced.
 2. Moses is commanded to go out and meet Pharaoh when he goes out to the water.
 3. Imagine what went through Pharaoh's mind when he got to his favorite bathing spot and found Moses waiting for him.
 4. He must have been thinking, 'Oh great. Here we go again.'
 5. This parallel with the first plague also clues us in that a new cycle of plagues is about to begin.
- B. When Moses speaks to Pharaoh, he says the same thing that he said before the first two plagues: "Thus says the LORD, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me.'"
 1. Notice that God refers to the Israelites as his people, even though they are working as slaves for Pharaoh.
 2. God claims his people as his own.
 3. This is the Christian's greatest source of comfort.
 4. As it says in the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism, my only comfort in life and death is "That I with body and

soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

5. Christians rejoice over the fact that our lives are not our own.
 6. We take comfort in knowing that Christ has purchased us for God with his precious blood.
- C. Such a notion is utterly appalling to the people of the world.
1. One of the most offensive things that you could say to a person in our culture is that their lives are not their own.
 2. The unbelieving world embraces the mindset that Billy Joel expressed when he sang, “I don’t care what you say anymore this is my life.”
 3. The sad fact is that these people are not really free.
 4. On the contrary, they are in bondage to sin and Satan.
 5. The only people who are truly free are those who have been set free to do what man was created to do: to worship and serve God.
- D. The Lord commands Pharaoh to let Israel go in order that they might serve him.
1. The Hebrew word that is translated as “serve” also means “worship.”
 2. Israel was brought out of Egypt so that they could worship and serve the one true and living God.
 3. This is the purpose of redemption.
 4. God does not save us so that we can get on with what we want to do with our lives.

5. He saves us so that we can glorify and enjoy him.
 6. This is why corporate worship with God's assembled people has always been at the heart of biblical religion.
 7. While we are certainly called to serve God in all areas of life, we gather for worship each Lord's Day because this is where we are reminded of our true identity and our true calling.
 8. God has set us apart from the world in order that he might build us into the community that exists to glorify him.
- E. When Pharaoh refused to obey the Lord once again, the result was a plague of flies.
1. Try to imagine how much misery this would have brought upon the people of Egypt.
 2. Even one fly can be a nuisance.
 3. Think about what it would be like to deal with swarms of flies.
 4. They would be all over your food.
 5. You would probably inadvertently swallow some of them.
 6. You wouldn't be able to sleep because the flies would be constantly pestering you.
 7. You wouldn't be very productive at your work because you would keep swatting at all the flies buzzing around you.
 8. And to top all of that off, your body would be covered with welts.
 9. Life was miserable for the Egyptians in the midst of this plague.

10. But the Lord kept the flies away from the Hebrews.
 11. He made a distinction between his people and the people of Egypt, setting apart the land of Goshen so that it was not affected by these pests.
- F. All of this misery, paired with the complaints of the Egyptian people, finally got to Pharaoh.
1. He summoned Moses and Aaron and told them to worship the Lord within the land of Egypt.
 2. While he was still unwilling to let them go, he offered them a national holiday as a concession.
 3. But Moses refused Pharaoh's offer for two reasons.
 4. First, he said that the sacrifices that the Lord required of his people would be an abomination to the Egyptians.
 5. Second, he insisted that the Israelites had to worship in the manner that God commanded.
 6. This is an example of what we refer to as the Regulative Principle of Worship.
 7. The Regulative Principle says that we are not free to worship God however we please.
 8. Our worship always needs to be regulated by what God says in his Word.

III. Set Apart for Protection

- A. We turn now to the plague on the livestock, where we see how God sets apart his people for protection.
1. Pharaoh said that he would let Israel go to sacrifice in the wilderness if Moses prayed for the Lord to take away the

flies.

2. But after Moses did this, Pharaoh went back on his word once again.
 3. As a result, God sent Moses back to Pharaoh with a warning that another plague would come if he kept holding Israel back from where they needed to go.
 4. When Pharaoh refused to listen, God sent a plague on the livestock of the Egyptians.
 5. Their horses, their donkeys, their camels, their cattle, their sheep -- they were all wiped out by a deadly disease.
- B. While verse 6 says "All the livestock of Egypt died", the word "all" cannot mean 'every single one' in this passage.
1. This is clear because some of the Egyptians' livestock was still alive during the plague of hail, as we see in Exodus 9:19.
 2. In this context the term "all" means either 'all over the place' or 'all kinds.'
 3. The same principle holds true in many other passages.
 4. "All" does not always mean 'all without exception.'
- C. In this plague, the Lord again makes a distinction between his people and the people of Egypt.
1. While the Egyptians' livestock was decimated, the Israelites did not lose any of their animals.
 2. A plague of this nature would have had a devastating effect upon the Egyptian economy.
 3. Not only did they lose the animals that they used for food, but they also lost the animals that they used for

transportation and farming.

4. But God's people were spared from this devastation.
5. This is an illustration of the protection that the Lord extends over those whom he sets apart to be his own.
6. God protected Israel in the midst of this plague, and he protects his people in all ages.
7. As it says in Psalm 121, "The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. He will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore." (vv. 7-8)

D. Of course, this does not mean that God always exempts his people from the suffering that falls upon the unbelieving world.

1. In fact, he usually does not.
2. In that sense the protection that was extended over Israel in this plague was unique.
3. Nevertheless, God always protects and preserves his people in the midst of whatever evils come upon them.
4. We are given a picture of this in the book of Revelation, where the church is described as sealed by God so that they are protected from the judgments that he sends upon the earth. (see Rev. 9:4)
5. Our Lord watches over us with perfect attentiveness.
6. Not even a hair can fall from our heads unless it is his will.
7. And whenever he does permit suffering to enter our lives, he always turns it to our ultimate good.

IV. Set Apart for Victory

- A. This brings us to the plague of boils, where we see that God sets his people apart for victory over our enemies.
1. The account of the previous plague ended with Pharaoh sending his servants to see if any of the Israelites' livestock had died.
 2. Even though none of them were dead, Pharaoh's heart was further hardened and he refused to let Israel go.
 3. By protecting Israel's animals, God made it abundantly clear to Pharaoh that this was not just a natural disaster.
 4. This was a judgment that was sent upon Egypt because of Pharaoh's refusal to listen to God's word.
 5. But in spite of such irrefutable evidence, Pharaoh continued to defy the Lord.
 6. As a result, God sent another plague without any warning: the plague of boils.
- B. In this plague, God instructed Moses and Aaron to take handfuls of soot from a kiln and throw it into the air.
1. When they did this, God miraculously caused the soot to spread all over Egypt and to become boils breaking out on man and beast.
 2. Don't miss the irony here.
 3. These were the kilns that were used to bake the bricks that the Israelites were forced to make.
 4. As with the plague on the Nile, God takes the very thing that Pharaoh used to afflict and oppress the people of Israel and uses it to bring affliction upon Egypt.

- C. The detail that especially stands out in this plague is the effect that it had upon the magicians.
1. As we saw in last week's sermon, Pharaoh's magicians were able to replicate the first few signs that Aaron performed.
 2. But when the third plague took place, which was the last plague in the first triad, the magicians were unable to copy what Aaron had done.
 3. They were forced to admit that this was not like the sleight of hand tricks that they performed.
 4. This was the finger of God.
- D. Here in this last plague in the second triad we see that the magicians are humbled once again.
1. Not only are they unable to copy the miracle, but they themselves are affected by the plague.
 2. Their bodies are breaking out with boils.
 3. They are shown to be utterly powerless.
 4. This is the last that we will hear of them.
 5. They have been defeated and vanquished.
- E. This illustrates something that is true for all of God's people.
1. In setting us apart for himself, our Lord also sets us apart for victory over our enemies.
 2. And make no mistake -- you do have enemies.
 3. The apostle Peter says in his first epistle that "your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Pet. 5:8)

4. Elsewhere Satan is referred to as the prince of the power of the air and the ruler of this world.
 5. Yet Jesus says this about Satan in John 12: "now will the ruler of this world be cast out." (v. 31)
 6. And Paul assures the Roman Christians that "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." (Rom. 16:20)
- F. This victory also extends over our other enemies.
1. God gives us victory over the world, over the flesh, and over death itself.
 2. Regarding the world, Jesus says this in John 16: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (v. 33)
 3. Regarding the flesh, Paul says this in Romans 7: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (vv. 24-25)
 4. And regarding death, Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 15: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (vv. 56-57)
 5. Just as God rendered Pharaoh's magicians utterly powerless before Moses, so also will he completely vanquish all of your foes.

V. Conclusion

- A. The people of Israel were no better than the people of Egypt.
1. They proved on many occasions that they were a people who deserved the same judgment that came upon Egypt.

2. Yet the Lord graciously set them apart to be his own.
3. He set them apart so that they could worship him.
4. He set them apart so that he could protect them.
5. He set them apart so that he could give them victory over their enemies.

B. The Lord has done the same thing for you if you trust in Christ for your salvation.

1. Though you have done nothing to deserve it, God has claimed you as his own.
2. He calls you to serve him and glorify him with your life.
3. He promises you that he will never leave you nor forsake you.
4. He will keep your life forevermore.
5. And he assures you that all of your enemies will one day lay vanquished at your feet.
6. God gives you the victory through your Lord Jesus Christ.