

God's Purpose & Glory in Plagues

Introductory notes:

1. This message has been written in more of a Bible Study format than as a sermon. You will notice indented and italicized questions periodically throughout the study. They are meant for group interaction. Feel free to pose them to the group and get their responses.
2. At the end of this study, there is a prayer guide, for specific prayer needs.
3. After the prayer guide, we have included a letter sent out from the elders of a "sister church". We feel it might be helpful to you.

God's Purpose & Glory in Plagues

It has been God's pattern, throughout Biblical history, to use plagues as a way of crushing people's idols, and turning their attention fully onto Himself.

He is glorified in this.

And His act of doing so constitutes a good, merciful, holy, and glorious act. May His name be revered and praised among all the peoples, *especially* in the midst of a plague.

HE ALONE IS WORTHY!

We can see God using the 10 plagues in Egypt for those very reasons.

Exodus chapters 7- 12 describe how God sent 10 different plagues against the Egyptians, in connection to bringing His people out of their bondage under Egypt. Most people, even non-Christians, are aware of this.

However, what many people are unaware of is how *targeted* those plagues actually were. God did not choose 10 random or arbitrary ways to display His divine power to the people in Egypt. Rather, He specifically chose those 10 particular plagues as a way of expressly targeting the common idols of the culture.

The first plague of God on Egypt, turning the Nile to blood, was a judgment targeted against 4 of the most well-known Egyptian gods: Apis (god of the Nile), Isis (goddess of the Nile), Khnum (guardian of the Nile), and Osiris, who was thought to be reborn each year when the river flooded. The Nile formed the basis of daily life and the national economy of Egypt, and was seen as a symbol of their strength. God devastated it, leaving millions of fish dead in the river, and turning even the water itself unusable.

The message was unmistakable: The Nile (along with its associated "gods") wasn't worthy of worship and reverence. The LORD alone was worthy of fear, awe, reverence, and worship!

The second plague, bringing frogs from the Nile, was a judgment against Heqet, the frog-headed goddess of birth. Because of the Egyptians devotion to the Nile, frogs were held to be

sacred and couldn't be killed. So God sent those "sacred" frogs in such numbers that they became a curse throughout all of Egypt. Again His message was clear: No created thing is worthy of reverence or worship. The LORD alone is worthy.

*What are some ways that we (American culture) worship creatures or created things?
{Think of sports hero's, entertainers, "mother earth", etc.}*

All the other plagues followed suit in like manner, targeting a specific "god" or group of "gods" that the Egyptians held high. The 3rd plague was targeted at Set, god of the desert. The 4th plague was targeted at Uatchit, the fly god. The 5th plague was targeted at the goddess Hathor and the god Apis, both of whom were depicted as cattle, and were seen as the protectors and progenitors of Egyptian livestock.

And in like manner, every plague that God sent was targeted against one of the gods that the Egyptians worshipped.

Now, think of it.

The people of Egypt were drawing their own sense of security from these idols.

They were even drawing their own sense of identity and worth from these idols, both as a nation and as individuals within that nation.

And then God sent the plagues.

The security and identity that the people were drawing from their idols was destroyed in short order. God was showing them, very clearly, that those idols had no power to protect, sustain, or uphold them. Those "gods" didn't care one iota for them. They had placed their trust in the wrong things. They had turned their hearts toward the wrong affections.

Perhaps He is doing the same thing with us!

Perhaps this plague has targeted **our** cultural idols as well.

Idols such as sports, entertainment, personal luxury, leisure, travel, wealth, etc.

What are some of the idols that you can recognize in American culture?

What idols in American culture have affected or influenced you over the years?

What are some of the things that we are tempted to mistakenly trust, rather than God?

To His People, God's purpose in the plagues of Egypt served to show that He was still sovereign over all things. He was still the only true God. He was the only one worthy of following and serving. He was still the only one who held the power of life and death...and He hadn't forgotten about them! He still saw and heard their cries. He was still able and willing to deliver them from their bondage!

Even in all of His grandeur, splendor, and awesome power, He still cared deeply and tenderly for His People. His purpose was not to destroy them, but to develop them. He would teach

them, through it all, to trust in Him with all their heart, and not to lean on their own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)

There are some other related points that need to be brought out in this discussion as well

Who is responsible for this plague?

Who was it that sent the plagues of Egypt?

What about other plagues in history?

This is an important question, because it has often been assumed by Christians of various stripes, that plagues, pestilence, war, and other “bad times” in general, were sent by the devil.

However, the Scriptures give us an entirely different picture. Here are some passages that tell us who really is in charge of the plagues.

Deuteronomy 28:58-60

Moses promises that if the children of Israel aren't careful to fear the glorious and awesome name of the Lord, then the Lord would “bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues—great and prolonged plagues—and serious and prolonged sicknesses. Moreover He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you.”

Amos 4:10

“I sent plagues among you, as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to Me...”

Revelation 16:9

“they were seared by the intense heat, and they cursed the name of God, who had control over the plagues...”

2 Chronicles 7:14

(records a face-to-face conversation between Jesus and Solomon, where He tells Solomon the following)

“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

Isaiah 45:6b-7

“I am the Lord, and there is no other. I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord who does all these things.”

So what does this tell us about plagues?

God is sovereign over all, and that includes plagues.

A.W. Tozer said it this way,

“While it looks like things are out of control, behind the scenes there is a God who has not surrendered His authority.”

If your first response to this viral outbreak (or any other kind of plague) is to “rebuke the devil”, then you are talking to the wrong entity. It is **GOD**, and God **ALONE**, who controls the plague.

Death is an inescapable fact of life.

There is a sobering fact of life that often comes to the forefront during times of plague and pestilence: death is coming for us all. In the end, there will be no escape for anyone. Even if you escape *this* trial unscathed, you won’t escape them all.

My friend, one of them has your name on it. Eventually, something *will* take your life.

And when it happens, it will be because the sovereign God of all has decided it, and decreed it to be so. **He** has decided how long you will live on this earth. **He** has decided the very hour and manner of your death. *And it is HE ALONE who holds your fragile life in His hands.*

That fact should cause a sense of reverent fear to course through your heart, along with a profound sense of gratitude. Look at how much life the Lord has blessed you with up to this point! And yet instead of being profoundly grateful for it, we often simply take it for granted...as if we are entitled to a long and stress-free life. That isn’t the case at all.

God doesn’t owe any of us a long and comfortable life.

We aren’t entitled to it, and He hasn’t promised it to any of us either.

We owe Him, but He certainly doesn’t owe any of us.

If He decides to take one of His saints home to glory, at any time, He is perfectly justified in doing so. And if He decides to take the life of one who hates Him, He is perfectly justified in doing that as well.

The unregenerate often attempt to forget the fact that, even at its longest, life is but a vapor (James 4:14). Death is coming for us all, and no man will escape it. That is a sobering thought, especially for those who are living under the righteous judgement of a fiercely Holy God.

Because of that, the unregenerate will often fill up their time and thoughts with other things, *anything*, to keep from being forced to dwell on that fact.

Plagues often bring the reality of life and death back into view.

We are confronted with our own mortality once again, and that isn’t fun.

But because of that, plagues are a divinely appointed opportunity for the gospel!

In times of calamity, people are often much more open to hearing the gospel. They are confronted with the reality that they aren't as safe and secure as they once imagined, and questions about eternity often come to the forefront of their mind. Those who were once too proud to even entertain a conversation about the afterlife, often experience a softening of their hardened hearts. It is no accident that many revivals throughout history were connected to plagues, wars, famines, and the like.

Times of calamity have a unique way of refocusing us on "big picture" issues. The small trivialities that once consumed so much of our thinking get put on the backburner of our minds. Because of this, again, ***we should prepare ourselves to make the most of the opportunity that God has put before us!***

So what is God's Purpose in Plagues?
His Glory and our good!

We can't forget about what Romans 8:28-29 declares to us:
"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."²⁹ For those whom He foreknew ***He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son***, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers..."

This plague is divinely decreed (meaning that God commanded it to happen), and He is using it to glorify Himself. Yet, He is also actively using it for our good. He is using it to teach us more about Himself, and to conform us more to the image of Christ. Remember, God's goal for our lives is ***not*** to give us a comfortable, easy, luxurious life! ***It is to conform us to Christ!***

Part of that conforming process is being able to calmly take the good news into a frantic and panicked world. We are able to confidently declare the truth of God's Word, knowing that God is using even this turbulent time for the advancement of His will, and the good of His people. We are able to have confidence that God will not waste any of our suffering or labor.

The apostle Paul said this about being thrown in prison because of the gospel, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel..." (Phil 1:12)

In the same manner, when we find ourselves living through a viral outbreak like this, (or a famine, or a pestilence, or a war, or whatever other trial or tribulation), if we will see it through the eyes of faith (rather than fear), and ask God to open our eyes to divine opportunities to share His Word, we will also be able to eventually say, "I want you to know that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel!"

Ephesians 2:10 says that "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Before we were ever born, God knew what circumstances that He would put us in, and He did it to allow us to partner with Him in advancing the gospel. What a privilege! He prepared situations long beforehand, so that we could walk in them and be His chosen agents to carry His light to a dark world. Therefore, let us not miss our opportunity!

Plagues make God's People a praying people once again

Finally, plagues drive us back to our knees.

We are again confronted with our dependency upon God. We realize that it is God who controls the plagues, and that same awesome God is attentive to the cries of His people. Therefore, we pray that He would show us mercy & spare our lives, but that He would also use this time for the advancement of His gospel!

Remember what 2 Chronicles 7:14 said?

“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, **if My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray**, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

We must be a humble, praying, God-seeking, repenting people!

There is certainly nothing wrong with praying that the Lord would deliver us and our families from the plague. However, our prayers shouldn't stop there. We should also be praying for others in our church body, that the Lord would be with them in this tumultuous time as well. We should be praying for our extended family, our neighbors, and others that God lays upon our hearts.

If we are quarantined at home with nothing to do, we shouldn't just sit back and waste our time. Instead, we should “redeem the time” (Eph 5:16) by being diligent and fervent in prayer! Perhaps we need to schedule several “family prayer times” each day.

Get creative!

We have an incredible hub of technology at our disposal!

Here are some possible ideas that have crossed my mind over the past few days.

- Schedule a google hangout to pray with friends.
- Facetime or call to pray with others.
- Take prayer requests on social media, then schedule a time each day for you and friends to pray about the requests. When God answers one of those prayers, post about it, giving Him glory for it!

So in summary:

1. It has been God's pattern, throughout Biblical history, to use plagues as a way of crushing people's idols, and turning their attention fully back to Him.

2. God's ultimate purpose for our lives is ***not our comfort, it is His glory.***
For that, we must be conformed to the image of His Son. In other words, God's ultimate purpose for us is not our comfort, but our conformity to Christ.

3. It is God who is ultimately in control of this outbreak. He alone is able to turn it back, and/or give us (people) wisdom as to how to subdue it.

4. Death is an inescapable fact of life, and plagues bring the reality of our own mortality back to the front of our minds. This makes many people much more open to the gospel, so be bold in proclaiming it.

5. Plagues should return us to a life of prayer. We must be diligent in humbling ourselves before God, praying, repenting, and seeking God.

----- END OF STUDY -----

Church Prayer List:

- Our Church Family – that they would not lose heart, and would encourage one another and minister to one another in this trying time.
- Wayne & Billie – Wayne is facing many physical ailments, and will be undergoing surgery to install a port for dialysis. Meanwhile, Billie is bearing a heavy load raising the kids, helping with Wayne, etc.
- Candi Geisler – Needs god's grace to endure medical treatments. Needs healing so that she can go home to her family. Her children need special grace as well, if Nick is the one cooking for them right now. ;-)
- Lynn Meadors – Struggling with health issues right now. Some kind of respiratory condition has him limited to his home. He has no family here (in the Ada area), so he will inform the elders if he has need of anything.
- Boyd Gross – Lost two close family members last week. Pray the Lord comforts him, and also guides him in reaching out to his remaining family.
- HealthCare Workers (Doctors, Nurses, Hospital Staff, Nursing Home Staff, etc.) – That the Lord would give them strength & wisdom to care for the sick in the very best way they know how. That the Lord would prepare them for the long road ahead.

----- END OF PRAYER LIST -----

Letter to Meridian Church members, (Comanche, OK), by its Elders

Meridian Church,

It is with heavy hearts that your elders announce that we will not be gathering regularly on the Lord's day to worship for the next two weeks and are requesting that life groups not meet. We do this in obedience to the word of our Lord which tells us, "let every person be subject to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1). Our president and our governor have requested that there be no gatherings of groups larger than ten persons. If our civil authorities were asking us to disobey our Lord for unrighteous reasons, we would respectfully disobey them to reverently obey the King of kings. The elders do not believe the government's request is contrary to the command to not "neglect to meet together" (Hebrews 12:25); rather, it is in harmony with the command to love our neighbor.

Understanding the nature of this virus and how it should be addressed is something that the elders would not want to pretend we are either competent or commissioned to do. For this reason, we look to the proper authorities and weigh their advice in light of the truths of God's word. Our concern remains to shepherd you to live unto our Lord.

Such action by churches is not without historical precedent as shown in Caleb Morell's article *"How DC Churches Responded When the Government Banned Public Gatherings During the Spanish Flu of 1918."* During this outbreak, churches complied with the authorities, and also, as the death rate subsided, they petitioned for the ban on gathering to be lifted. Initially some tried to find a creative solution by gathering outdoors, but this was soon banned also. The churches no doubt sharply felt the pain of not being able to assemble.

In reflection on this, the elders, while we desire to remain faithful in shepherding you, will not offer a substitute to corporate worship as we do not believe there is a substitute. While technology is a gift, we don't believe "church" is something that can be done online.

We know all things come from the hand of our sovereign God. When our Lord wields the rod, we should not try to mitigate the pain. If the church is not able to gather, we believe she should sense the loss and cry out to her God in lamentation, contrition, and humility. At the same time, we will be making recommendations and resources available for households to worship together on the Lord's day.

While we always encourage fathers and husbands to lead and disciple their families, it is critical that they do so during this time. The elders want you to know that we are praying for you and that we are here to assist you in this stewardship. Additional means of ministering to you through this time are being planned and will be announced soon.

Finally, let us be assured, that though our God may wield the rod, He does so in love. All things work together for good to those who love God. His love can be soft and it can be severe, but for His children, there is no condemnation and glory awaits.

"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all" (2 Thessalonians 3:16, ESV).

On behalf of the elders, Grace and peace,

Josh King

----- END OF MERIDIAN ELDERS' LETTER -----