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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Lent III – Midweek

March 6, 2024

Text: Exodus 8:16–24

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Exodus chapter 7–12 records the fierce contest between the devil and God; the devil represented by Pharaoh and his magicians, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represented by Moses and Aaron. A fierce contest may be giving too much credit to the devil. For the Lord God Almighty is absolutely and totally triumphant while Satan, Pharaoh, and his magicians are utterly defeated.

If you read through those 6 chapters of Exodus, one wonders how it is that Pharaoh didn't see that he was hopelessly outmatched. In the first plague, the Lord turned all the waters of Egypt into blood, for a full week! Pharaoh hardened his heart because his magicians did the same thing. The second plague was an infestation of frogs. Exodus 8:3–4 describes the frogs getting into oven and kneading bowls; the houses and bedrooms (imagine trying to go to sleep with a bed full of croaking frogs!), into the ovens and kneading bowls. They covered the land. Pharaoh initially relented and said the children of Israel could leave. But Pharaoh changed his mind and hardened his heart again for two reasons: 1) once Moses prayed, the frogs went away, 2) he saw that his magicians also produced frogs by their secret arts!

In these first two plagues, the Egyptian magicians were able to mimic, copy what Moses and Aaron did. It appears as if they have the same ability and power as Moses and Aaron. But there is one big difference! The magicians were never able to reverse the plagues! They didn't turn the Nile back to clean water nor did they command the frogs to leave.

That's the essence of demonic power. It's a cheap, incomplete imitation of God's power. It has the superficial appearance of power but lacks any true substance. This really shouldn't surprise us. In John 8:44, Jesus describes the devil as a murderer from the beginning. A murderer can only take life away, not create it. In John 10, Jesus called Satan the father of lies. Until the end of time, the devil will spread his temptations by mimicking the blessings of God. He promises joy and happiness, wealth and health, fame and fortune. But it's a lie and what he gives is a cheap copy of God's full life. No matter what the devil promises, he always steals, kills, and destroys.

But there comes a time when the devil can no longer copy the power of God. Some things only God can do. That time came with the third and fourth plagues. For the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron to strike the dust of the earth with Aaron's staff. And gnats filled the land. But this time, the Egyptian magicians could not produce gnats and they couldn't get rid of them. The magicians saw and understood what Pharaoh refused to see. They told Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (vs. 19). But Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let God's people go.

The next day, the fourth plague began to ravage the land as swarms of flies filled the houses of Egypt. The magicians are not mentioned. In fact, they will only be mentioned one more time, during the sixth plague. Even then, the Bible says they could not stand in the presence of Moses; their misery was too great. The magicians are utterly defeated.

But there is one thing that must be understood about this fourth plague. From this point forward, the Lord makes a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites. Verse 22–23 says, "But on that day (the day when the 4th plague begins) I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. Thus, I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen."

There is a glorious truth here which we must hold onto with might and main. God calls His people to be separate from the sin, rebellion, and unbelief of this fallen world; to be distinct and different. This truth should cause us to rejoice and shout to the heavens and, at the same time, cause us to bow before God in deep humility and fervent thanksgiving. The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 2:11–16, reminds us that without God’s mercy and love, they were separated from God. Listen to St. Paul:

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles ... were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.... that he might create in himself one new man ...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross.

We rejoice and sing praise to God that we have been filled with hope; we are no longer atheists, “without God in the world”; for we have been brought near to God through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Dear saints of God, you are saved by God in order that you might be different and distinct from the evils of this world. In Christ, the Father has made us new and we are a distinct, holy people. Our land of Goshen is the Church wherein we are made partakers of God’s divine nature and gifts.

We rejoice and shout with praise because we have been made separate from the ravages of Satanic slavery. But we do so not with pride and self-satisfied arrogance but with deep humility and fervent thanksgiving to God. There is nothing in us, no merit, no virtue, no commendable characteristics, that require God to claim us as His own. He chooses us out of love and compassion.

Moses had to remind the people of Israel of this truth just before they were about to enter into the Promised Land. God chose them because of His own faithfulness. Listen to Moses’ words (Deuteronomy 7:6–8) and hear them as

being spoken to us as the new people of God called to be separate from the world, the devil, and their evil:

⁶“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt....

The wonder and amazement for us Christians is that God looks upon us at all! And yet, He places His love and grace and eternal gifts upon us, so much so, that we become His adopted sons and daughters. For God so loves that He gave His only begotten Son... Our boasting is in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One we place all hopes, all rejoicing, all boasting, all devotion. We boast in Christ Jesus with great humility and joyous thanksgiving.

Satan may attempt to copy God's works and ways; he does so in order to deceive and destroy. But praise be to Jesus. Our Lord has conquered in the fight; Satan and his demons are utterly routed and put to a public shame in the cross of Jesus. The Lord has called us to be His unique and blessed people. All who look to Christ in faith and trust receive this blessed life. Invite your family, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances to church. Tell them about Jesus. Let all who boast, boast in the Lord Jesus Christ.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

Exodus 8:16–24

16Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.'" 17And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. 18The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. 19Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

20Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. 21Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. 22But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. 23Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen."'" 24And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies.