

The Futility Of Ignoring God

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[0 : 00] Well, we often like to think that if we ignore something long enough, it'll go away. Like with toothache.

You don't want to go to the dentist. You know you probably should, and you've got this aching tooth, and you just think, if I ignore it for long enough, maybe it'll just go away, and maybe I won't have to book an appointment at the dentist.

Who wants to go to the dentist? Or speeding fines or parking tickets, which often don't get followed up, and you think, well, you know, I got this in the post, or I got this stuck to my car window.

Maybe if I just ignore it and file it in the back of the drawer, it'll go away. You know, I'll forget about it, the government will forget about it, and everything will be fine.

We often like to think that if we ignore things that we don't like to address, for long enough, they'll go away. The problem is when we start thinking that with God's Word.

[1 : 01] When we hear God's Word, and especially when we come across those things we don't want to hear, when we're sitting in church and the preacher opens God's Word and starts to say uncomfortable things that we don't want to hear, we think that if we ignore it for long enough, it'll go away.

Maybe you're sitting in church on a Sunday and you feel really convicted by something. Yeah, that hit me deep on Sunday.

But then by Monday morning, you've already filed it far away in the back of your mind, and you tend to ignore it after you've heard it.

I think we've all got a bit of that, don't we? When there's something uncomfortable, we want to ignore it and hope that it'll go away. Well, if the plagues of Egypt teach us anything, it's the foolishness of thinking that God can be ignored.

And as we start looking at them and we look at Pharaoh's first few attempts to ignore God, and we see what God is saying to him and how he can't ignore that, we quickly see why in these plagues, why ignoring God will never work, neither in ancient Egypt nor in our world today, much as we might like to.

[2 : 27] And so let's work through these plagues and see what we learn and see how Pharaoh's attempts to ignore God go, shall we? So the first plague, the first plague we have is the Nile turning to blood.

Have a look in your Bibles from chapter 7, verse 14. Then the Lord said to Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hard, he refuses to let the people go.

So Pharaoh is still, at this point, even though Moses and Aaron have had some chats with him, Pharaoh is still not convinced about Israel's God.

He's still not convinced that he needs to listen to what Israel's God is saying. After all, Israel are slaves, and Egypt have their own gods. And there's lots of gods, of course, in the ancient world.

And lots of different nations had different gods. We've got to understand this, in this world, your nation had its own set of gods. And so Pharaoh is basically asking, you know, why should I listen to this one?

[3 : 30] And it's a fair inquiry. You know, why should Pharaoh, of all the gods that existed, why should he listen to the Hebrew God? In fact, we saw this back in chapter 5.

Do you remember the first time Moses and Aaron came to him? And they said, you know, God demands that you let the Israelites go. What was his response? Chapter 5, verse 2. But Pharaoh responded, who is the Lord that I should obey him by letting Israel go?

I don't know the Lord. So he didn't know God. He didn't know God. Much like people today who say, you know, there's so many different religions.

There's so many different religious texts. So many different beliefs. Why should I listen to the God of the Bible? Why should I listen to Christianity? And not, you know, the Koran or the Hindu texts.

Why this one? That was basically where Pharaoh was at, here, at this point in Exodus. There's so many different gods around. Why the Hebrew God? Why should I listen to this one? And so, God decides to remedy that situation here in chapter 7.

[4 : 38] So in a response to Pharaoh saying in chapter 5, verse 2, I don't know the Lord that I should obey him. Who's the Lord?

Look at how God now responds in chapter 7, verse 17. This is what the Lord says. Here is how you will know that I am the Lord.

Watch. I'm about to strike the water in the Nile with the staff in my hand and it will turn to blood. This is how you will know.

Pharaoh, you don't know? You want to know who the Lord is? Okay. Watch this. Now, this was God's first major public awareness campaign. Not just in Egypt, but in history.

His first major public awareness campaign of who he is and its epic. You remember during election time how politicians run public awareness campaigns?

[5 : 36] They plaster themselves on the telephone poles. And all of the telephone poles are covered with different politicians who are trying to make you aware of who they are and what they can do.

And we tend to ignore most of them, except the ones that we're convinced will somehow impact our lives. Maybe we'll vote for those people because they've made themselves known publicly.

Well, God shows who he is and what he can do to Egypt in a spectacular way by going straight to the source of the superpower of the day.

Egypt's source of life and their economy, which was the Nile River. It was the center of Egyptian life. And it was the source of life in an otherwise desert area.

So it's where they got life. It's where they got wealth. It's where they got their power. That's the thing. The Nile River. And God goes straight to that and turns it into a symbol of death.

[6 : 38] As if to say to Pharaoh and Egypt, Do you want to know who I am? I'm the Lord who holds your life and death in my hands, Pharaoh.

That's the symbolism of what he's taking the source of life and turning it into a symbol of death to show Pharaoh that he's the Lord of life and death.

God is wanting to wake Pharaoh up to the fact that he's not just some local deity. He's just not some other religion of many. But God is the God who Pharaoh is dependent on for life itself.

Pharaoh has to realize he has stumbled upon the true God of all creation. And this first plague should have settled the matter.

Pharaoh should have responded by going, Whoa, whoa, sorry, I didn't know it was you. Okay? I'm sorry, I'll do what you say. It's, you know, based on what God does and what it means.

[7 : 40] That should have been Pharaoh's response. But instead, let's look what happened. Chapter 7 from verse 21. The fish in the Nile died and the river smelled so bad the Egyptians could not drink water from it.

There was blood throughout the land of Egypt. It's very obvious God has done something here. But, verse 22, But the magicians of Egypt did the same thing by their occult practices.

Pharaoh turned around, went into his palace, and didn't even take this to heart.

Didn't even take this to heart. Despite this powerful, obviously godly sign from the God of life and death, Pharaoh, what is the first thing he does?

He finds an excuse to ignore God by getting his magicians to do the same thing. We don't know how they did it. And it certainly wasn't on the same scale as God did with the whole of the Nile and all the canals and stuff.

[8 : 52] Because they were already blood. They still are by the next verse. So the magicians, they must have just done it on a smaller scale, maybe in a bowl or something, whether it was through supernatural means or probably just like putting some powder in the water and going, Look, Pharaoh, we can do it too.

So you can ignore Moses. Because we can turn water into red stuff. And even though it was probably not on the same scale, it was enough for Pharaoh to turn around and ignore.

It's all he needed. All he needed was some excuse. And his magicians gave it to him. He just needed his magicians to do something similar so he could have an excuse to turn around, go into his palace and ignore what was going on outside.

People still today do that, don't they? They're desperate to find any reason to ignore God. And they don't need much in the way of counter-evidence.

It doesn't need to be good evidence. It just needs to be something, just an excuse to turn around and ignore what God says is fine. That's why the theory of evolution is so popular, by the way.

[10 : 00] The theory of evolution? Why is it so well known even among non-biologists? Why, even though it is just a theory, is it taught as fact in schools?

And why do people latch themselves onto it even if they've got no interest in biology? Why? Because it's an excuse not to believe that we have a creator who we must listen to. And so people love it by nature.

It's an excuse. Just like Pharaoh got an excuse not to believe in the God of creation in Egypt, people are looking every day for excuses not to believe in the God of the Bible so that they don't have to listen to him.

And these Egyptian magicians who Pharaoh employed to give him such an excuse, they exist in every age, don't they? In every age, people exist who provide us with reasons, bad ones, but reasons nonetheless to ignore God and what God is saying.

As Paul said to Timothy, watch out for them because they worm their way into homes and into mines and into school syllabuses. You know, today, these Egyptian magicians wear lab coats and study biology, but they're doing the same things as they did in Egypt.

[11 : 12] They're giving people what their itching ears want to hear, reasons to ignore God. And people just lap it up. Just as Pharaoh did.

As his magicians gave him a reason to ignore Moses and Aaron, he turned around, went into his palace, shut the door, and didn't think about it anymore.

And so how did that go for him? Well, let's see. The second plague. The plague of frogs. Frogs. So Pharaoh ignores God's first warning.

Look at 7:23 again. Pharaoh turned around, went into his palace, and didn't even take this to heart. And so what does God do? Look at chapter 8, verse 3. The Nile will swarm with frogs.

They will come up and go into your palace, into your bedroom, and onto your bed. You think you can hide in your palace, Pharaoh?

[12 : 11] You can't ignore me. You try to escape to your palace? I'll put frogs in your bed. Frogs in your bed. Imagine that. Imagine you're sleeping soundly, and then you feel something moving at your feet, and it wakes you up, and you look, and there's a whole bunch of frogs that have popped on your bed.

Where did they come from? Imagine that. Frogs in your bed. Gross. But you know what? Despite how gross that is, God is still being very gentle here in these first few plagues.

This is more of a discomfort than a real problem. Frogs aren't going to kill you. They're just going to gross you out. But God is deliberately making Pharaoh and Egypt uncomfortable.

God is not above making people uncomfortable. In fact, he does it a lot. God is happy to make life really uncomfortable so that we listen to him before there are more serious consequences.

Because if we keep not listening to God until we die, it's the most serious consequences of all. It's hell. It's judgment. And so God, if we don't listen to him, if we keep on ignoring God, he will make life uncomfortable.

[13 : 20] He's happy to do that so that we listen to him. And that's what he's doing for the Egyptians here. That's what he's doing for Pharaoh. He's scaling up the discomfort in the second plague.

Pharaoh couldn't ignore him anymore because the frogs were on his bed. And so even though his magicians, this is so funny, I think it's deliberate Hebrew humor here.

What did his magicians do? Verse 7. The magicians did the same thing by their practices and brought frogs up onto the land of Egypt. And then what happens is they're just making it worse.

Now there's more frogs that Pharaoh has to deal with. So these magicians really have kind of failed by trying to do something to help him, trying to give him an excuse to ignore God. But the next verse, verse 8, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, appeal to the Lord to remove the frogs from me and my people.

Then I will let the people go and they can sacrifice to the Lord. So this is a breakthrough, right? He's asking for prayer. Something's, you know, his magicians couldn't do it this time.

[14 : 22] Even though they could, they couldn't really. He's, because it's just made the situation worse. He's asking for prayer because now he's feeling it himself, personally. It's hit his own life and his own bed and his own bedroom.

He can't get away from it. And he realizes he can't get rid of these frogs by himself. He needs God. So he's feeling it now. He realizes he needs God. And so he asks for prayer because things are really uncomfortable.

But you know the problem with that, right? You know the problem with praying to God when things get uncomfortable and when things start to hurt is that the moment it stops hurting, we stop, don't we?

Look at what happened in verse 15. Chapter 8, verse 15. But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, because God did answer his prayer, God did remove the frogs.

When Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them as the Lord had said. And that is just as true today as well.

[15 : 26] God graciously makes life uncomfortable to wake people up to their need of him. And then you know what they do? When it's obvious that they need God, when life is so uncomfortable and God's message is getting through, they start praying.

And they may even come to church, start listening until things get better. And then they stop. And so we come to the third plague.

Mosquitoes. The Bible says gnats. It could be lice. The Hebrew word literally is clingers. We don't quite know what insects they were, but there were definitely insects that clung to you, bit you, did something.

Probably mosquitoes. I mean, there was water around. Egypt has a lot of mosquitoes anyway. And so this was the next discomfort that God is putting up the volume.

Mosquitoes. I just saw on YouTube when I was preparing for the sermon, YouTube, it's amazing how it does this. It knows what you've been thinking about. And it popped up this video on mosquitoes.

[16 : 38] So I clicked on it. And did you know that mosquitoes, they have this, what's called a proboscis, which is the stinger, the thing they suck your blood with.

But actually, if you go on a microscopic level, this is pretty great. It splits into six different things. It's crazy. It's like aliens. The proboscis removes, and then you've got six different mandibles that come out.

Two of them are razor-sharp sores that soar through your flesh. The other two are these mandibles that hold the skin open. Then there's a middle probe that goes in and looks for a blood vessel, and then there's the sucking thing that goes down and takes your blood.

So that's gross. Anyway, that's what, something like that is what God decided is going to be plague number three.

Now, now we know the bother of having one mosquito, don't we? Right? You're trying to sleep, and then you hear, and you can't sleep, and then you have to, like, I've got the zapper.

[17 : 47] Oh, you've got to get one of those. Those zappers. It's so satisfying when you get it, and it electrocutes this thing. But you, I've spent, I've spent half an hour trying to hunt a mosquito, one mosquito down before going to sleep.

Imagine just having your house filled with clouds of them. That's what was going on in Egypt. It was far worse than the frogs, because these things clung to you, clingers.

They were biting. They were sucking blood. Surely, Pharaoh is going to start listening now, especially because his magicians have officially run out of tricks.

Have a look at verse 18. The magicians tried to produce the gnats, or mosquitoes, using their occult practices, but they could not.

The gnats remained on the people and the animals. The magicians have failed their task, finally, and this is the last we hear of them.

[18 : 44] Well, the next time we hear of them, they're not, it's just an embarrassing situation for them. You'll see that later. But this is the last time they try to reproduce the plague. They've run out of tricks, and Pharaoh officially has no more excuses to ignore God.

And yet, amazingly, he does. Verse 19. This is the finger of God, the magician said to Pharaoh. Even the magicians were saying, Pharaoh, you better listen to this guy.

But Pharaoh's heart was hard, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. And it's the same today, isn't it?

Even when people run out of reasons to ignore God, even when God has answered all their questions, even when he's made life uncomfortable enough for them to realize how much they need him, and maybe that is, maybe that is you right now.

Yeah, or listening to this sermon. Maybe you're at a place in your life where God is shouting to you for your attention, and yet you still file him somewhere deep in the back of your mind.

[19 : 53] You still want to ignore him. You still want to neglect to take his words seriously in your life. Well, these plagues are a warning to stop ignoring God, and to start listening, because God won't stop.

You know why? Because this is God's world, and he is determined to make himself known in his world to you. And just as he made himself known through Moses and Aaron in Egypt, he makes himself known today through his church, through us.

As we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is God's ultimate revelation of himself, and as we proclaim the resurrection of Christ, which is the ultimate sign that the world cannot ignore, much as they've tried for 2,000 years to disprove it, they can't.

It's the ultimate sign that can't be ignored. And if you're a Christian, you know what you are? You are part of God's public awareness campaign to this world.

You are part of God revealing himself to a world that still wants to ignore him. And of course, that's going to be hard, but it is a great honor. We are in the position of Moses and Aaron as the church, which means our job as Christians is not just to come to church and sing songs, but it's to take the truth out there in the world.

[21 : 24] That's why we're here. We are employed in God's public awareness campaign. But no, that's not going to be easy because hard hearts will always want to find excuses to ignore God or worse, they'll want to shut up the messenger.

But we mustn't give up. Much as the world will harden their hearts and resist us and pass bills in parliament to make it more difficult for us to make God known, we mustn't give up.

We mustn't be intimidated. And you know why? Because what this here in Exodus teaches us, what these plagues teach us, is that for all the attempts to explain God away, at the end of the day, God's truth can't ultimately be ignored.

And as long as we are faithful like Moses and Aaron were to take that truth into the world despite the hardness of heart that we come across, to take this truth into our workplaces, into our schools, into our sports clubs, wherever God gives us the opportunity to take it, as long as we are faithful to do that, we can know that people's attempts to ignore what you say will ultimately fail.

Because this is God's word and He will be heard. This is God's truth and this is God's world and He will be heard in it. And so we can take courage from that.

[22 : 53] As we do the job of Moses and Aaron, we can take courage from the fact that ignore us as they may, ultimately God's word will be heard.

We've just got to be faithful to take it out and in His time it will do what He puts it in the world to do. Just as John 1 verse 5 says, as John says, the beginning of His gospel and this is so encouraging and with this I close.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for this warning and this encouragement.

This warning that You cannot be ignored in Your world. and I pray, Lord, that You would help us to remember that and help us never to ignore, especially when Your word makes us uncomfortable.

But we also thank You that we have the great task as Your church of making You known to the world today through proclaiming the gospel of Christ and we thank You for this reminder that as we do that, Your word will be heard by those that You appoint to hear it.

[24 : 10] And so give us courage to go out of this place and take the truth into the world and be Your representatives. In Jesus' name. Amen.