

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES BY PRESERVING HIS PEOPLE

Exodus 8:20—9:12

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

How do you think the majority of people in Janesville would answer this question: Rate the following organizations, groups, and institutions in order of importance with 1 being the most important organization in Janesville to 10 being the least important institution. GM plant, family, city government, banks, Woodman's, churches, Farm & Fleet, UAW Local 95, Boy Scouts, schools.

Honestly, how would you rank them? Why?

In the following passages from Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians, what are we told about the church?

- 1:22-23 *God has made Christ head over everything for the sake of his church, which is his body. Christ fills the church.*
- 2:19-22 *The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and Jesus is the cornerstone. It is being built into a holy temple where God dwells by his Spirit.*
- 5:25-27 *Christ died for the church in order to make her holy*
- 3:10-11, 21 *God's eternal purpose has been to show off his wisdom by bringing the church into existence. The church is the place through which and in which his wisdom is displayed.*

The church is comprised of every human who has been saved by the death of Christ and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit from throughout all of human history. Or to say it from the human side, it is the assembly of every human who has trusted in the promise of God to save by his gracious work in and through Jesus Christ, the Messiah. There is no question that from God's point of view, the church is the most important institution on the face of planet earth. The family is not the most important institution, nor is government, businesses or

schools. Jesus Christ, the most important person in history came into the world for the sake of the church. According to Ephesians 3:10-11, everything God has done in the world has been done to this end, to create the assembly of God's people made up of humans from every nation who are gathered together out of their mutual love and devotion to Jesus Christ, to the praise of his glory.

In our passage this morning, we are going to see how God shows off his glory by how he creates and cares for his church. In 8:22, God mentions the people of Israel and how he is going to deal with them as opposed to how he is going to deal with Egypt. He says he is going to deal differently with Israel in order that Pharaoh might know that Yahweh is in the land. He is not just some local deity but the Lord of the whole earth, including Egypt and he is showing this by treating Israel, his people, different from Egypt. Just as Ephesians 3:10-11 says, God loves his people in order to show his glory to the rulers.

STUDY

1. Review Exodus 5:1-6:9. Summarize what has happened to Israel since Moses and Aaron have showed up and how they feel about it.

The people of Israel were initially very excited when Moses and Aaron showed up and told them that the Lord had seen their misery and that he had sent them to deliver them from their slavery. However, the first time that Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and commanded that he let Israel go free, Pharaoh had increased the suffering of the Hebrews by requiring them to make bricks, the main way he was using their slaver labor, without being given straw. In other words, they had to keep making the same number of bricks but they were not given straw but had to go get it themselves. The slave drivers were beating up the Hebrew foremen because they were not meeting their quotas of bricks. The Jewish people were furious with Moses and Aaron and blamed them for their worsened conditions. When God sent a message of hope to them through Moses in chapter six we are told in verse nine that they did not listen to Moses because of their discouragement and because of their cruel bondage.

2. The word translated “discouragement” in 6:9 is literally, “impatience of spirit”. It is used in Numbers 21:4. Why was Israel unwilling to listen to God’s promises through Moses?

They are mad at God and believe that he is not taking care of them like he ought and so they refuse to listen to what he says.

3. What are some other evidences of the sinfulness of Israel from their history as recorded in Genesis? (See 12:10-20, 16:1-6, 26:6-10, 27:1-41, 29:16-30:24, 34:25-29, 37:12-36, etc.)

Abraham lies to the Egyptians about Sarai and thus she becomes part of Pharaoh’s harem while he grows rich. She only escapes by God’s mercy and the pagan king rebukes “godly” Abraham. Sarai and Abraham use Hagar the slave girl as a surrogate mother because they don’t want to wait for God to fulfill his promise. Isaac lies about his wife, Rebecca to save his neck, just like his father Abraham. Jacob and his mom deceive blind Isaac so that he gives the blessing of the firstborn to his second born son, Jacob. Esau plots to kill Jacob for his trickery and betrayal. Jacob is tricked into marrying two sisters. He loves one of his wives, Rachael but not the other one, Leah. His family is a cauldron of jealousy and passions run amok and he ends up having 13 children through four women. These 14 are the “tribes of Israel.” The sons of Jacob butcher the helpless men of Shechem and then steal all their property and enslave all the women and children. Ten sons of Jacob beat up, threaten and then sell into slavery their younger brother, Joseph.

4. In light of the history of Israel, what is not the reason that God treats Israel well while he destroys Egypt? What is the reason?

The point is that God does not call Israel, “my people” because of who they are. All they have done is sin. They are the people of God because God has graciously, contrary to what they deserve made them his people. God is not going to afflict them with the plague of flies, not because of their goodness and not because they have already suffered so much. He is going to preserve them because he has made them his people. He has pledged to love them because of who he is, not because of who they are.

There is a very common human assumption that God does good to good people and bad to bad people. If you don’t pay attention to the details of the Bible you will read statements like those in 8:22 and simply assume that the reason God protects Israel and the reason he punishes Egypt is because Israel are the good guys and Pharaoh and the Egyptians are the bad guys. The fact of the matter is that both are bad guys and while Pharaoh is only getting what he deserves, Israel is being treated well by God because God has determined to love them as his people.

5. What is the reason that people belong to the church? (See Romans 11:1-6, esp. v. 5)

If you are a member of Christ’s church and therefore loved by God and promised eternal life it is not because you are better, smarter, more spiritual than those who do not belong to Christ’s church. You are a member of the people of God by grace, not by anything you ever did. God cares for us, his church, because he chooses to love us, not because we are lovable people. We are sinners, saved purely and simply by God’s grace to the praise of his glory, not to the praise of our goodness.

6. How does this make you feel?

God reveals his glory through the church by not treating her as she deserves.

Every English translation of v. 23 says something like this, “I will make a distinction between my people and your people.” However, in every translation there is a footnote for the word “distinction.” The footnotes say, the Hebrew word standing behind the English is literally, “redemption, deliverance or ransom.” There is no textual reason to translate the word “distinction” rather than “redemption.” Therefore, v. 23 literally says, “I set a redemption/ransom between my people and your people.”

7. Why would Moses use such an unusual word at this point? In order to answer that question we need to ask several other questions. How is

it right for Yahweh to treat sinful Israel with such kindness? How can he treat Israel different than Egypt and remain just?

Most people, when they are confronted with God's choosing some and not others think it is unjust to those not chosen. This way of thinking reveals a typical human view of human value. God is obligated to give everyone an equal chance because all humans are equally valuable. However, the view of the Scriptures is far different. The Scriptures repeatedly ask, how is it just for God to welcome any sinners into his presence? How can God, who is holy and just, have fellowship with those who have despised him and flagrantly disobeyed his laws without being accused of being a corrupt judge? That is the question I believe that Moses is seeking to answer by using this word. It is right for God to protect Israel and call them his people because he has appointed a redemption for them. It is right for God to destroy Egypt because they are guilty sinners and he has not appointed a redemption for them. They have done nothing to obligate him to provide a ransom for them and neither has Israel. He, in the freedom of his grace has chosen to provide a redemption for his people, Israel and not for Egypt. He treats Egypt fairly, with justice. He gives them what they deserve. However, he treats Israel graciously by providing a redemption for them.

8. What is the redemption that Yahweh appoints for Israel? (See Psalm 111:9, Genesis 15:1-16 & Matthew 26:28, Heb. 6:13-19, 7:27, 9:11-22)

It is the covenant he made with Abraham and which he sealed with the death of the animals in Genesis 15. It is a blood sealed covenant. All of the animal sacrifices in the OT, which were commanded by God as Israel's redemption, pointed ahead to the final sacrifice of redemption, which was performed by Jesus. Everyone who belongs to the church does so, not on the basis of their own goodness but on the basis of the goodness of Jesus. He obeyed God's law for us and he suffered the death we are due so that now God places all those who trust in Christ into his church. We are part of the body of Christ through our faith in Christ because he is our redemption. This is the reason that God does good to his people. He does good to us for the sake of Jesus. God loves us, sends his Holy Spirit to us, and will receive us into heaven

because of what Jesus has done for us, not because of anything that we have done. He is our ransom.

9. Why is it right for God to include you in his church, which he loves?

God reveals his glory through the church by providing a ransom for her.

10. The swarm of flies force Pharaoh to come to Moses for relief. He tells Moses the Israelites can sacrifice in the land of Egypt. Moses says that would not be right. Why would it not be right (vv. 26-27)?

There are two reasons it would not be right. First, he tells Pharaoh it would not be right for Israel to offer sacrifices in Egypt because the Hebrew way of worship is an abomination to the Egyptians and if they were to sacrifice in view of the Egyptians, they would be filled with hatred and rage and kill them. We are not told why the worship of the Hebrews would be so offensive to the Egyptians but we can surmise that the basic reason is that they would be worshipping a God other than their gods and doing so in ways that contradict and condemn the way in which the Egyptians worship their gods. Second, it would not be right because God has commanded Israel to worship him in the desert and you cannot worship God any way you want. You must worship him as he commands, so they must go into the desert, away from the Egyptians to worship God.

11. According to Jesus in John 15:18-19, why does the world hate the church?

The world hates the church because it hates Jesus and Jesus chose us out of the world. We don't belong to the world any longer but to Jesus and because the world hates Jesus it hates us. In essence we have joined the enemy and betrayed the world and nobody likes a traitor. We are now like Jesus (1 John 4:17) and because the world hates him, it hates us.

12. The Israelites in their worship accentuated their distinctiveness and thus inspired the hatred of the Egyptians. What are some ways God makes us distinct that are offensive to the world we live in?

There are many ways that the church is like the cultures we live among. We eat the same kinds of food. We live in the same kinds of homes. We use the same kinds of transportation and enjoy many of the same kinds of entertainment. We wear the same kinds of clothes. You can't go into Woodmans and tell by looking who are members of Christ's church and who are not. However, we do not worship the same gods that our culture worships. We worship the one true and living God. Our first allegiance is to Jesus Christ and his people, not our job, our houses, our nation, our families or our athletic team. There are ways of living and speaking that we will not practice. There are ways of living that we engage in that are exactly the opposite of how our culture lives. God makes us distinct from the world around us and because of this, the world hates us. He makes us distinct to show off his holiness and love. To be a part of Christ's church means that you are living a different kind of life. You love what those around you do not love and you hate much of what they love. God shows off his holiness in and through making us into a holy people. See Titus 2:11-14, 1 Peter 2:11-3:18, 4:1-5, etc.)

13. What are some inappropriate ways that Christians seek to be distinct from the world?

14. What are some ways you have personally experienced the animosity of the world because you are distinctively holy?

God reveals his glory through the church by making her distinct from the world.

15. We are explicitly told that God spared the Israelites from plagues 4 (flies), 5 (death of livestock in the field), 7 (hail), 9 (darkness) and (10) death of firstborn. It appears from 9:11 that the boils were only on the Egyptians. However, it would seem that Israel, living in Goshen, experienced the first three and probably 8 (locusts). In addition, during the year that the plagues were going on, they lived in slavery. What do these experiences of suffering, while God is rescuing them from Egypt, tell us about God's work of saving his church?

As we think of Israel being delivered from her slavery and taken through the desert into the Promised Land, we can see how God preserves his people, not from suffering, but in and through suffering. He keeps his people from experiencing the full brunt of his wrath against the sins of the world but he doesn't keep his church from experiencing all the expressions of his displeasure with this world of sin. In addition, he promises us that we will experience the suffering of persecution. This mixture of God's sparing us some suffering and of God's preserving us in suffering is seen throughout the history of Israel.

16. What are some ways we see this pattern in the life of Jesus?

Like Israel, Jesus endured all the sufferings of this world, including death and yet God preserved him throughout his life and brought him safely into his presence through the resurrection from the dead. While Jesus endured all the miseries of this life, God did spare him from experiencing the miseries of sin as he never sinned and he protected him from his enemies until it was time to die.

17. According to Acts 14:22, 2 Cor. 4: 8-10, 16-17, 1 Peter 1:6-7, 2:18-22, 4:12-19, etc., how is this pattern repeated in the church?

Christ is saving his church through the sufferings of this life, not from them. He protects us now from the ravages of sin and from the ravages of false teaching and from some of the afflictions of this life. However, we do experience the animosity and sometimes the violence of the non-believing world and most of the afflictions of God's curse upon this world that are common to all men. He preserves our faith through these sufferings. He reminds us that though these sufferings are hard, yet they are nothing compared to the sufferings of hell that he is graciously delivering us from and the glories of heaven that will be ours.

18. How does the suffering of the church reveal the glory of God (Rom 8:18)?

When we patiently suffer the afflictions of this life out of faithfulness to Christ we reveal that Christ is a better treasure than a pain free life.

God reveals his glory through the church by preserving her to the end.