

The Devouring Vengeance of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 November 2018

Preacher: Alan Barts

[0 : 00] All right, everybody. Good morning. As Jesse just said, my name is Alan, and I am one of the pastors here at One Harbor Church.

It is a great privilege to bring the Word of God to you this morning. And so, yeah, I'm just excited about today's passage and the story that we're going to go over.

Typically, we preach through books of the Bible. And every once in a while, we'll take a little, you know, four or six-week hiatus from that and teach on a particular subject that we think will be meaningful for us as a church body.

But we are working through the book of Exodus. And today, we're going to cover the very popular subject matter of the story of the plagues, at least the first one through nine of those, the first nine of those.

And so, yeah, so strap on your seatbelt there, and we're going to get on with it. The title of my sermon this morning is a very pleasant one. It's called The Devouring Vengeance of God.

[1 : 01] Yeah, I know that's kind of frightening. If you're new to the church and Christianity and you're thinking, great, this is the Sunday that I chose to come, the old fire and brimstone kind of thing. You better turn or you're going to burn kind of thing.

But no, that's not what we're going to accomplish today. Okay? So, yes, it is frightening, and no, it's not. And so I think my prayer is that you will leave this morning feeling a mixture of things, but included among them something of a reverence for the beauty and majesty and goodness of God.

So don't be scared. Okay? I would like to address a few challenges that we have this morning. First of all, there is a lot of scripture that we're going to cover. We're going to cover actually chapters 7 through 10 this morning.

So we're going to move fast, and I would actually encourage you to go back and read the chapters this afternoon or sometime during your quiet time and really dive into those. This passage also covers some of the most outrageous, over-the-top, and otherworldly subjects that you will read in the Bible.

In addition to the fact that many people struggle to believe them, it's more difficult to believe that they are in some way connected to Jesus. And then finally, there are layers to this drama.

[2 : 21] And you can miss some of the deeper layers if you're too distracted with the larger-than-life spectacle of the plagues themselves. So we're going to try and dig a little bit into the story and see some of these layers.

Okay? So we've got a quick recap of what's been happening. God's people, the children of Israel, they're in bondage. But even though they're in bondage, they continue to multiply rapidly.

As we learned last week, there's approximately 600,000 men in the children of Israel, which would put their numbers somewhere over a million, 1.2 million, somewhere around there, maybe 1.5 million strong total.

And Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, if you will, he's really an insecure man. He's really an insecure tyrant. And he's afraid of their numbers. So he enslaved them.

And then we learn that Moses is chosen by God to bring the people out of Egypt. And when he's chosen, there's a bit of a back-and-forth conversation between God and Moses.

[3 : 22] Moses' favorite word is but. You know, God says, go and do this. And Moses is like, but? I'm insecure. I have a speech pediment. And all these excuses. So it turns out that Moses is actually afraid of his own shadow, it seems.

But God won't budge. And he says, Moses, you're my man. You're going to do this. I choose you. And so he basically relents and does it. We're going to start off this morning in Exodus chapter 7.

As I mentioned, we're going to start in verse 1. And I'm going to read a few verses. Starting in verse 1, it says, And the Lord said to Moses, So basically we have three characters that are explicitly featured here.

We have Moses, we have Pharaoh, and we have God. We're going to look at the role that each of them play. There are lessons to be learned from them all. And there's something that we need to note here too.

Moses and Pharaoh, they're actually the incarnational representatives of their prospective leaders. We have Moses representing God. And then we have Pharaoh representing Satan or the devil.

[5 : 07] Just said there in the scripture, I have made you like God to Pharaoh. Pharaoh. So while there's only three characters explicitly mentioned, it's really four characters. Two battling out through their proxies.

Moses is the instrument of God. Pharaoh is the instrument of the devil. The devil's role isn't explicitly stated, but it's fairly obvious when you consider the Hebrew symbolism found throughout the story and add it to what we know from history and archaeology.

In the Bible, the animal chosen to personify the devil is the serpent. And it is precisely the serpent that Pharaoh identified with.

You know, the Pharaoh's ceremonial headdress was created with a cobra. Snakes were both feared and worshipped in Egypt and became the ultimate symbol of power.

The serpent-crested diadem of Pharaoh symbolized all the power, sovereignty, and magic with which the gods endued the king. It's a quote by John Curid. But not only did Pharaoh identify with serpents, but pledged his allegiance to them when he took the crown.

[6 : 11] He would pray to become like a snake, fearful, terrifying. And that prayer would conclude with this line, Let me rule a leader of the living. Let me be powerful a leader of spirits.

So it's not sensational or an actual overstatement to believe that Pharaoh actually sold his soul to the devil, the true serpent. Now, consider who God and the devil picked to be their agents, if you will.

The devil is working through one of the most powerful men in the world. And then God picks Moses. Right? It's almost like God picked the worst person ever.

Moses is not impressive by any stretch. He's impulsive. He faces some failure early in life, which makes him totally insecure. And so he lives out the best years of his life, relative age 40 to 80, shepherding another man's animals.

He has no self-confidence. And he also appears to have some kind of speech impediment. In fact, if Moses interviewed for a job at One Harbor, which is one of the things that I do as executive pastor of this site, I'm not sure he would actually be considered for the position.

- [7 : 30] Honestly. And God picks him to take on the largest, one of the largest empires in the world. And this story we're about to hear is not merely a story of plagues.
- It's a story of these two men who change in great ways. And it's through the way they change in relation to God that the story turns. See, up until chapter 7, Moses has been fickle at best.
- Always has an excuse. But here something changes. And you might have actually missed it when I was reading the scripture. Moses does exactly what God tells him to do. Verse 6 says, Moses and Aaron did so.
- They did just as the Lord commanded them. There's no but here. It's actually a breath of fresh air. Moses is changing. He's not into a better speaker.
- He's not actually immediately a better leader. He just starts obeying. That's key right there. And he just starts obeying. One pastor gave this brilliant definition to obedience.
- [8 : 33] Obedience. Doing what God says. I know that's profound. You guys can write that down. Take it with you. There's no charge on that one. All right? Doing what God says.
- So that's the change. Instead of balking, Moses starts doing what God tells him to do. But it changes on the inside too. We don't see the insecurity anymore. His insecurity was rooted in who he was.
- Prone to mistakes. Not a great speaker. Et cetera, et cetera. We have no reason to believe that the way Moses was looking at himself changed. Rather, what he was looking at changed.
- His confidence seems to increase because he is no longer driven by his own strengths or weaknesses. He's driven by who God is. Humility isn't thinking less of yourself.
- It's thinking of yourself less. Humility isn't thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less. Moses simply does what God told him to do.
- [9 : 38] Plain and simple. God said, go do this. And he did it. And now everything changes. Literally, the very next verse, verse 8, things start happening.
- Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, when Pharaoh says to you, prove yourselves by working a miracle, then you shall say to Aaron, take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh that it may become a serpent.
- Yeah, we see here that God certainly has a flair for the dramatic. He doesn't beat around the bush. But the Hebrew word that's actually being translated serpent is not specific.
- It doesn't actually say it was a snake. You know, some translations actually use the word dragon. And you could kind of translate it into a sea monster kind of thing.
- The point is, it's chaos. That's the point. God is making a statement. He's like, you mess with me? You going to mess with me, punk? I'm going to overwhelm you. I'm going to unleash a monster on you.
- [10 : 38] Not playing around. We keep on in verse 10. It says, so Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent.
- Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents.
- And you've got to think, it's got to be shocking to Moses and Aaron, right? And they're like, dang, well, that didn't go so well. Look, the bottom line is, this isn't about Moses and Pharaoh.
- Moses can't turn staffs into snakes. His God does that. Pharaoh's magicians can't turn staffs into serpents. Their gods do that.

This is where the conflict begins. But it gets better. Verse 12 says, but Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. God is saying, you have power.

[11 : 39] You have power. You have power to come against me and fight. You can fight against me, but I will devour you. The episode is a story within a story.

There's tons of hints of what's coming. Because God is going to beat the Egyptians using their own weapons. He is going to make what is sacred to them and turn it around. God could have had the staff turn into a lion.

He could have chose whatever he wanted to. Now he's saying, I'm in control of even the things you think you control. Even the swallowing and the devouring is foreshadowing.

It will be the Red Sea later on that God uses to devour Pharaoh's entire army. Not spiteful. In fact, much of the plague narrative seems spiteful.

When in fact, there is a ton of mercy offered the whole way through. The book of Romans says that God gives us over to the lust of our hearts. You may think that's not merciful, but it's actually merciful.

[12 : 38] It's showing us what we're made of. It's showing us that the things we put our hope, trust, and total thought pattern into is going to fail us. It's merciful.

God's doing that here. He's saying, Pharaoh, what you worship is going to devour you. Not only in this episode with the staffs, but most of the plagues seem directly connected to something the Egyptians worshipped.

And it's throughout the narrative God keeps telling Pharaoh, through Moses and Aaron, that I am the Lord. I am the Lord. The invitation is to come.

But Pharaoh does not respond well to any of this. After seeing his magicians beat by Moses and Aaron, it says, in verse 13, it says, still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them as the Lord had said.

This is the other change in the character of which the story turns. Everything we're about to read unfolds is two things happen. Moses obeys, and Pharaoh disobeys and becomes hardened.

[13 : 43] Disobedience will harden your heart. Pharaoh's hard heart is mentioned over and over and over in three different ways. First of all, it says Pharaoh's hardened his own heart.

Pharaoh's heart was hardened. And in many places, it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. I have tons of time here, but many people say that's not fair. You know, why would God harden Pharaoh's heart?

Many people also think that this story is somehow unique. I would say that this story shows us, quite simply, how life works when we disobey. As one biblical scholar put it, we find in Exodus two stories of Pharaoh's heart.

One is the story of his moral choices, whereby his heart becomes set in its ways, habitually formed to be against the God of Israel. That's how character formation works.

The other is a story of judgment on Pharaoh's heart, where the hardness is imposed on him as the due consequence of what his own choices had made him. Our decisions are totally intertwined with God's rule over us.

[14 : 53] One guy put it, The price we pay is that every choice, for good or ill, goes to fashioning our characters, and whether in the long or short term, or both, makes us answerable to the judge of all the earth.

Judgment, it doesn't start in the next life. It starts right now. Disobedience, again, will harden your heart. It's a key. So it is remarkable to see this story develop as one man obeys, and increasingly grows in confidence and security, and sees his followers helped by God himself.

While another man, Pharaoh, disobeys, and increasingly finds that his heart is hardened against God, becoming so hard and so brittle that it will eventually shatter, as he and his followers are crushed by God himself.

So, that's a lot to take in right there. And now we're just going to do a flyover over the first nine plagues. There are ten of them, but we're going to cover the first nine today.

Plague number one, The water turns into blood. Pharaoh is told by Moses that the Lord demands Pharaoh let the people go or else.

[15 : 59] As a warning, It's incredible that through the entire plague narrative, God gives Pharaoh a warning before each plague. Pharaoh objects, causes bluff, and now the Nile River, which was the source of Egypt's economic vitality and strength.

God turns it against her. God turns it against its own self, and turns it to blood. Scripture says it's not just the Nile River, it's all water.

All water kept in earth and clay jars. Everything turns to blood. Everything starts dying. Everything stinks. Pharaoh causes magicians, and they do the same.

Pharaoh doesn't relent. It says his heart remains hard. Then we see plague number two, which is the frogs. Frogs were a sign of fertility in Egypt. God turns it against them.

They're everywhere. They're in their houses. They're on their tables. They're in their beds. They're everywhere. Pharaoh again calls the magicians, and they do the same. Excuse me, but if I could do those kinds of things, the last thing I'd want to do is produce more frogs.

[17 : 08] If frogs are everywhere, the last thing you want to do is produce more frogs, right? I can imagine one of the guards there in the palace whispering to the magicians, you're not helping. What's your problem?

Pharaoh begs for mercy. Exodus chapter 8, verse 8 says, Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, Plead with the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.

Moses prays. God takes them away. But Pharaoh hardens his heart. He doesn't change. You see this pattern developing here? Then plague 3, the gnats.

I hate gnats. Sinehem, who's the god who supposedly protected Egypt from pests, like gnats and flies and locusts, which we'll see here shortly.

God turns the pests against Egypt. So where's this Sinehem now? Now, this is also a change too. The first time that the magicians, they cannot replicate this plague.

[18 : 14] They cannot create the gnats. Exodus 8, 19 says, Then 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.

Plague 4, we see the flies. There's a big distinction here from the first three to this one. From here on out, we see Goshen, which is the land where the Israelites were housed.

They're protected. There's no flies there. So now God is demonstrating two things. He can direct the forces of nature, but also with specificity. And he protects his people.

Here again, Pharaoh promises to release them. But when God relents, he doesn't keep his word. Plague 5, this guy must be really hard-headed.

I mean, seriously, I mean, how long does it take? Plague 5, death of the livestock. Israel's livestock are protected. This time it says, Pharaoh sends actually someone to investigate Goshen, and even after confirming that Israel had been spared, his heart remains hardened.

[19 : 29] Plague 6, boils. Right. That's exactly right. Exodus 9, 11 says, and the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils.

This is the big one here. The magicians can no longer stand before Moses, but Moses is standing before Pharaoh. For the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians.

Plague 7, hail. This is actually the longest of the narratives. I'm going to read a little bit out of Exodus 9, 14 through 19. It says, For this time, I will send all my plagues on you yourself and on your servants and your people so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.

For by now, I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose, I have raised you up to show you my power so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

You are still exalting yourself against my people and I will not let them go. Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.

[20 : 39] Now therefore, send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them. What's remarkable here is that God is actually providing a warning, an escape from his own plague.

The most destructive so far. I'm not a military person, I'm not a veteran, never been in the armed services but I would think that I would never give my strategy to the enemy.

I can't imagine us telling ISIS, you know, this is what we're going to do, we're going to come here at this specific time and do this kind of thing. But if you're God, you're like, you already know the outcome so it's like, okay pal, this is what's going to happen. Right?

It goes on to say that Pharaoh's servants that feared the Lord heeded the word and were spared. His heart is still hardened.

Plague ate the locusts. Pharaoh's servants try and convince him to let them go. They actually say, don't you see Egypt is ruined? But, Pharaoh gives conditional release.

[21 : 47] He doesn't want everyone to go. This is a key thing here too. Half obedience is still disobedience. I'm sure many of us as parents have had those conversations with our kids.

Right? Half obedience, you're going to do this, part of it, I told you to do all of this, is still disobedience. Everybody's familiar with the United States policy on negotiating with terrorists.

We don't negotiate with terrorists. God has the same policy. He does not negotiate with anyone. You will obey or there will be consequences.

And so, another plague comes. It's so bad that Pharaoh actually admits he has sinned against God, begs for forgiveness, begs for relief, and God gives it to him.

This plague, number nine, is darkness. Again, Pharaoh says they can leave but not with their livestock. conditional obedience. Amon Ray, the personification of the sun and the chief deity of Egypt.

[22 : 57] God blots him out. And so, the plague strikes. Pitch black for three days. It said, darkness to be felt.

There was actual terror among all the Egyptians. Still does not relent. And the tenth and final plague we're not going to look at today. It is the story of the Passover. We're going to look at it next week.

The plague of all plagues where God strikes down the firstborn of Egypt. Which is ultimately giving Pharaoh over to himself. Because Pharaoh had done this to Israel.

He murdered the firstborn of Israel. And so, while we learn about obedience and disobedience from Moses and Pharaoh, we also learn about God himself. There is revelation of God in the plagues.

He is powerful. He's powerful. He's over creation. He's over our very hearts. Nothing can be used as a weapon and stand against God. Nothing.

[23 : 54] He wants people to know him. He wants them to know that I am the Lord. But there is something else. God is a God of justice, judgment, and vengeance.

God is a God of justice, judgment, and vengeance. vengeance. Now, if you're like me, that sounds really frightening. We don't want to think about God as being a God of judgment and vengeance.

There's three concepts here, and they certainly all deserve some explanation. First, God is a God of justice, meaning that he designed the world to exist in a kind of equilibrium.

In his world, there is meant to be equitability, fairness, impartiality, and most importantly, love. Love of God and love of each other.

Jesus actually said these words in the New Testament. Love of God and love of each other. That equilibrium is thrown off when there is injustice, which is when people, for selfish gain, exploit one another.

[24 : 58] God told Pharaoh, you have exalted yourself. When there is justice, people stand before God as peers. Injustice creates a system where there is oppressed and oppressor.

We have the oppressed and we have the oppressor. There's no equality. And when injustice happens, God judges it. And he judges it because he is loving. He demands justice for the oppressed so that, so that, so they might both return to the state of equilibrium they were meant to exist in.

One in which they love God and love each other. God's judgment is meant to return creation to the state of equilibrium. It is an expression of love. Miroslav Volf, a Croatian theologian, said this.

He said, I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath? God is love and God loves every person and every creature.

That's exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was the casualty of the war in former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come.

[26 : 08] According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3 million were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed. My people shelled day in and day out.

Some of them brutalized beyond imagination and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century where 800,000 people were hacked to death in 100 days.

I can't imagine that. How did God react to the carnage? By dotting on the perpetrators in a grandparently fashion? By dotting on the perpetrators in a grandparently fashion? Sorry.

By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with him? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil.

God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love. Wrath. That's the vengeance part of judgment.

[27 : 14] Vengeance is a way of describing how God's judgment is worked out in the face of injustice. It is punishment or retribution for the wrong that has been done. And it is an expression of his wrath with a vengeance means with emotional intensity and often times on behalf of someone else.

Vengeance is a topic that the 20th and 21st century church has done some strange things with. Kind of like the subject matter of sex. We know it's there but we don't like to talk about it.

Kind of makes us squirm in our seats. And even though the Bible has good things to say about it in church we only have bad things to say about it. Right? The general attitude towards vengeance in the church is that it's bad.

But Romans 12 verse 19 says, Beloved, never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God for it is written vengeance is mine I will repay says the Lord.

This is actually the apostle Paul the author of that book quoting Deuteronomy 32. It doesn't say don't avenge yourselves because vengeance is bad. It's good and it's holy so holy that only God can do it safely.

[28 : 30] And what he will do will be beyond what you could ever accomplish. The story of the plagues is a story of vengeance but something that often gets overlooked in these stories is how restrained God is.

In fact, maybe you read these stories and others in the Old Testament and think the Old Testament God, he's pretty much a loose cannon. He's out of control. God's judgment and vengeance are administered with patience.

Notice that the plagues escalate over time. God could have just started by wiping out the firstborn. God only punished Pharaoh after giving him ample opportunity to repent.

And this is not the only story that shows us this. For instance, Canaan conquest is often misunderstood as unfair to the Canaanites. This is later on in the Old Testament when Israel has actually taken over the promised land and there are some inhabitants there.

And the way that God instructs the Israelites to handle them is kind of disturbing if you don't know the background. But earlier in the Bible, Genesis 15 verses 13 through 16, God is speaking to Abram who later becomes Abraham, the father of Israel and says, Then the Lord says to Abram, Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.

[29 : 51] But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried in a good old age and they shall come back here in the fourth generation for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

God was not willing to use the Israelites to judge the Amorites which were inhabitants of Canaan, the promised land before it was time. God's judgment is always, always deserved and is earned.

Whenever you think God is being unfair, there's a lot of you who don't know, you see it with the Egyptians. The judgment escalates according to their choices.

But not only is it patient, the other remarkable thing about God's judgment is that it's always accompanied by mercy. It's easy, easy to miss that. We look at the judgment, we look at the hell, the fire, the brimstone, those kind of things, but it's always accompanied by mercy.

Most of the plagues come with warnings and presumably they all did. We just don't know because some of the narratives are shorter. God tells them what's going to happen. Whenever God judges, he always provides a way out.

[31 : 11] The primary objective of God was to bring Pharaoh in Egypt into obedience, not to punish them for the sake of punishing them. The punishment was meant to humble them.

Vindictive punishment is where you go after someone even after they repent. Vindictive punishment is where you go after someone even after they repent.

And yet at every point when Pharaoh asks God to remove the plague, God listens. He relents. He's very quick. So we see this pattern here. I mentioned it earlier.

God says, Obey me. Know my name. But if you don't, here's the consequence. And we see Pharaoh disobey. The consequence happens. Pharaoh begs for mercy and God immediately listens.

You may be thinking, at least we don't live in the Old Testament days. Right? God's justice, judgment, and vengeance are still real.

[32 : 09] We said that each of the plagues gives us revelation. But what is also true is that in the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, the final judgment of God upon earth gives us plagues.

If you read the book of Revelation, you will find that some of the imagery is taken directly from Exodus. In fact, Revelation 16 says that water will be turned to blood all over the world.

In fact, the story of Exodus serves as a kind of quintessential drama with associated images that Scripture returns to over and over and over.

This Exodus thread binds the stories together. And so, here at the beginning of the Bible, you have God overwhelming His enemies to save His people. And at the end of the Bible, you have similar accounts of God doing the same to save His people.

So, the question is, how do we respond to this kind of story? How should God's vengeance make us feel? God's vengeance, well, it's good news and it's bad news.

[33 : 15] Good for the oppressed, bad for the oppressor. Friends, if you're suffering at the hands of someone else, I want to encourage you today, God will avenge you.

one of the biggest mistakes we make when we read this is to identify only with Israel. We always play the victim role. Right? We always do that.

We make ourselves out to be the protagonist all the time. We're always the good guy. And maybe you have been a victim. Maybe you have. Maybe you are being impressed in some way right now. But, if you know yourself, you know that you also have been the oppressor.

one of the greatest mistakes you can make in life, I can make in life, is to assume that there is some kind of darkness we will never descend to.

Or that your loved ones would never descend to. Because when you do descend to the depths of human depravity, you will be blind to it. You won't see it.

[34 : 18] You think Pharaoh is some kind of unicorn of wickedness. Well, then you don't know yourself. And maybe you're feeling that conviction right now of things that you've done to others.

Harsh words, mockery, slander, et cetera, et cetera. Oh, if you're like me, and I'm really good at this, you can ask my wife. I'm really good at justifying my actions.

Because that person, well, they're just a piece of work. They deserve it. Right? Right? But you know, you've been wicked.

Yeah. That's the hard part when you look in the mirror. Well, even in the bad news, there's good news. Thank God. Thank God doesn't want to devour us.

He does not want to devour me or you. God wants to devour your enemies. Just like God wanted Pharaoh to repent, wanted Pharaoh to humble himself and come back into right relationship with him and with others, God wants the same for you and me.

[35 : 31] You and I, we've been Pharaoh. We have disrupted the equilibrium. God's vengeance is coming for all injustice. But he offers you a way out because he doesn't really want to devour you.

Remember the conflict. It's not between God and you. The conflict is between God and the serpent, the devil. And it's being fought over you. It's being fought for you.

And the incarnational representative sent to you isn't Moses, thank God, some guy who had to have his arm twisted to go into this. It's Jesus Christ himself.

not only does he have a message of forgiveness for the things you've done, but he's going to graft you into the family. We're going to be sons and daughters.

We're going to be equal heirs. You don't remain some neutral party. You get all the benefits of being God's child while God now turns and devours your enemies.

[36 : 34] How cool is that? But even that's not all. You see, the way God does this is the last way you would expect. In the story we just read, Aaron's staff became the serpent and devoured the other serpent.

Right? God's instrument became the very thing God detests. So it could devour God's enemy. This is the story of the gospel.

Jesus is not only the better, Moses. He is the better version of Aaron's staff. We see that on the cross he took on himself all the injustice and the oppression of the world.

The Bible says he who knew no sin became sin. On the cross Jesus became a serpent so he could devour the true serpent. Sin and death.

To devour something, to swallow something, you have to taste it. On the cross Jesus tasted, swallowed, and devoured sin and death.

[37 : 42] Isaiah 25, 6-8 says this, On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food, full of marrow, of aged wine, well refined.

And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.

And the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. Thank God for that. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, every time you turn away from God, your heart is going to harden a little more.

Disobedience is having effects on you that you don't even realize. God's judgment is coming. It's not something that's pleasant to talk about, but it is coming. But, thank God there's a way out.

You can face it yourself, or someone else can face it for you. On the cross, Jesus became like you, taking on your serpent-like qualities so that he could swallow up the consequences for your actions.

[39 : 06] He devours death. You devour a feast of rich food, of well-aged wine. He gets the plague. You get the riches of the empire. Sounds like a good deal to me.

He's saying, come. To the Christian, to you and I, vengeance is something to be grateful for. Thank God for that. Everyone in the world will either one day be your brother, or will one day be totally vanquished.

If you are being oppressed, it's okay to want vengeance. Let me tell you that. If you're being oppressed, it's okay to want vengeance. It's okay to ask God to avenge you.

The Bible is full of those prayers. Call out to him. He can handle it. But it's also good to remember that you were once an enemy of God. And he wants your enemies to be saved as much as he wants it for you to.

Let us be a people who trust God with vengeance, confident that it will happen. Do not avenge yourselves. As tempting as that might be, do not avenge yourselves.

[40 : 20] In fact, the exact opposite is true. Romans 12 says this, To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink, for by doing so, doing, for by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Let's be a church that follows the example of our Savior. Should we be subjected to evil, to suffering, to oppression, you know, we may have to taste it if we hope to overcome and devour it.

But thank God we have Jesus Christ who bridged that gap for us, who took on that. We get to celebrate that this morning with communion. communion. We get to celebrate the broken body and the shed blood that covered our serpent-like qualities and made us white as snow, as the Bible says.

We are heirs. We get the full inheritance because of Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus devoured sin and death.

We come to the table to devour, to eat, to consume. this is a foretaste of the greater feast that is yet to come. So take a moment and consider how you have responded to oppression.

[41 : 46] Have you been the oppressor or have you been the oppressed? Ask for forgiveness. God is there. He will meet you right where you are.

If you've not yet come to Christ and ask him to be your Lord and Savior, man, I would love to have the opportunity to talk with you about it after the service. Jesse would love to have that opportunity as well. So just take the time to think about this and then come take communion.

Amen.