

The choir sang “We are God’s people, called by His name. God holds us close in the palm of His hand.” Those words speak to us today, in 2010. And, with God, it’s always been that way. God’s people belong to God. The Bible proclaims it. Let’s hear it.

After the second plague of frogs ended, the Lord told Moses to have Aaron strike the earth with his staff and bring forth gnats over everyone throughout Egypt. He did, and gnats swarmed everywhere. The magicians tried to do the same, but this time they couldn’t. So they became convinced Moses’ God was different as they proclaimed, “This work is the finger of God.” But not Pharaoh; as usual, he hardened himself against God. That was plague three. Now let’s hear about the next plague. READ Exodus 8:20-32.

Did you hear “I will spare the region of Goshen where my people live, and I will make a clear distinction between your people and my people?” God protected the Israelites. God protected God’s children.

You are special in God’s eyes. You are set apart, protected. It’s all over the Bible. God is aware of who you are, where you are, what goes on in your life, and God has a special purpose for you, just as God had a purpose in creating this nation God was fighting to free from Egypt. It’s been that way from the beginning.

- Think back to Abraham. God said to him, “I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great” (Gen 15:1). And eventually, God’s miracles overcame Abraham’s infertility.
- The Psalms express a sense of belonging to God and receiving God’s protection. King David wrote, “On God rests my deliverance and my honor; God is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me” (Ps 62). David’s life was in danger but God fought to keep him safe from his enemies.
- Prophets encouraged the people, “Do not fear . . . I will help you . . . your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel” (Is 41:14). God brought Israel out of the exile, led them to reestablish Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Remember Nehemiah?
- What about the story of Ruth and Naomi? God protected and provided for Naomi in extraordinary ways after she was widowed, and then both her sons died. She was forlorn, but God had a future of great hope and joy for her.

God’s help is very real today too. Kim Bernhardt and her 4-year-old son were driving home one day when she suddenly found herself driving straight into a tornado. She tried to get out of its path but it just picked up her van and lifted it above houses, and she watched roofs and debris flying all around her. An eyewitness later reported seeing a white van “flying” about 50 feet in the air. “It was like someone holding a little toy car in his hand,” she said.

Kim began to imagine herself living and her son dying. How could she stand that? She unbuckled her seatbelt, and crawled back to her son, pulling him to the floor of the van to shield him and telling him, “God is with us.” And she began to pray the Lord’s Prayer and coming to

the part, “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” an overwhelming thought came to her mind: *I didn't put the van in park!* So she reached up and put the van in park, and laid back down over her son. The van was still going sideways through the air, and she thought, *why did I do that?* Then all of a sudden the van landed gently on the ground. Stunned, Kim said, “It’s like we were in a cradle. We were let down. I felt one gentle motion and then another . . . and we were gently set down.”

They landed in someone’s front yard, facing a house, and because the car was in “park,” it just stayed still. It might have rolled into the house. Trees and homes all around them were torn apart. She and her son walked away without a scratch.

Kim believes that God’s presence was very real in the midst of that terrifying tornado. Now when she says, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” she thinks about how heaven met earth as God was there with them, giving her peace, even though she expected to die. She said, “I knew I was in the hand of God.”¹

Kim Bernhardt knows by experience that God is present and powerful.

Do you have that kind of experience of God? What realities are we learning about God, which are expressed in God’s name?

- God is present
- God is powerful

God says, “I will spare the region of Goshen where my people live, and I will make a clear distinction between your people and my people.” So the plagues begin to be specifically targeted against the Egyptians, and Israel is spared. God is out in front, fighting for God’s children. God is fighting against those who do not believe.

God’s purpose in doing that is to give a sign to Pharaoh. Pharaoh refused to believe in the power and presence of the Lord. It was only after the flies devoured Egypt that he was ready to talk. It was only after chaos that he called for Moses.

How does chaos change your life? Do you find that you notice God more when things are wrong? We should not be surprised that God uses times of chaos or trouble or pain or confusion to get our attention. I bet if we took a survey we would find that most people discover God during those times. God can bend our will more readily when the heat is on. So God, frankly, doesn’t mind giving us a little heat; some tests. What did Peter say? God, Yahweh, the present and powerful God, is protecting you by his power until you receive your salvation. So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. (1 Peter 3:5-6)

Well, that doesn’t seem fair. But, we know this to be true ourselves. “No pain, no gain,” right? God knows this. Peter says, “These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as

¹G. Woodfin, “God in the Whirlwind,” http://www.cbn.com/700club/features/amazing/protection_bernhardt.aspx, accessed 3/2/2010.

fire tests and purifies gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise, glory, and honor on the day Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world (1 Peter 3:7-8).

So chaos, hardship, trial got Pharaoh's attention and he was at least willing to negotiate. But God was not into negotiating. Pharaoh's deal was no deal. Moses insisted that God be listened to and that the Israelites be released exactly as God commanded.

The purpose of all these acts was to prove God's presence and validate all that God claimed his name meant, and also the authority of His command.

Who needs to know about the reality of God's presence and power?

- Pharaoh. God wants Pharaoh to acknowledge that God is.
- The magicians. And, they did just that when they told Pharaoh, "This is the work of God."
- The rest of the Egyptians. This will become evident next week.
- Most of all, Israel needed to know. They are the ones who need to see God is here, because they are going to follow God in the desert and how will they do so? Only if they develop faith now. They have to see that God is separating them now, and taking care of them in power, protecting them even in the midst of slavery.

And, you need to know about the reality and power of God. If you do not acknowledge God, you will be judged. *Do you know?* This story is not just a historical event that happened once upon a time, but it lives to bring the same question to you. Do you trust that God is present for you too, and that you are set apart and special to God, and under God's protection?

God cares about not just winning a battle over God's enemies, but helping people of all nations understand that God's name is empowering. Embrace it today. Trust your life to Him. Resisting God has major consequences. How can you resist? "We are God's people, called by His name. God holds us close in the palm of His hand."

AMEN