

**Bible Devotions: Lock Stock & Barrel**  
**Devotional Reading for Outdoorsmen**  
**(Old Testament)**

Exodus 7:17-18; 8:13-15

Shooting Fish and Turtles

*Thus says the Lord: "By this you shall know that I am the Lord. Behold, I (Moses) will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that are in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river."*

*So the Lord did according to the word of Moses. And the frogs died out of the houses, out of the courtyards, and out of the fields. They gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the Lord had said.*

Right up front, I disclaim any notion that shooting into the water is okay. It is improper and unsafe to do so. That said, what you are about to read is factual, as near as I know, but not endorsed as recreational activity, even though I, too, have indulged.

According to *The New York Times*, May 5, 2004, fish shooting has been around for about a century. I suspect that fish shooting has been around a lot longer, at least since the invention of gun powder. Today, it is a legal activity in Vermont and in only one county in Virginia.

Fish shooting often results in several pieces of Pisces floating around. That's what you get when a bullet turns a carp inside out. People interviewed by *The New York Times* verified this by stating that with a direct hit, "They just kind of shatter." Hunter-fishermen report that the better method is to shoot just ahead of the head, killing them by concussion. Kind of like barking squirrels with a rifle.

Irretrievable fish pose another problem. Dead fish that don't float to the surface sink to the bottom or wash ashore later, to wantonly rot away. They do make good food for all the turtles.

Speaking of turtles, and as an unsophisticated segue into the Scripture above, a long time ago I hunted the varmints with a rifle. Not for sport, mind you, but to control the damage they were doing to the sewer pond of a certain, unnamed church camp.

The containment area was overrun with snappers. They had undermined the banks of the pond to the point of causing numerous cave-ins. Something had to be done. Enter my arsenal of handguns, rifles, and shotguns. I literally threw everything I had at them, bullet-wise.

The location of the pond is key to understanding why I decided I could do this, although I remind you of the statement in paragraph one. The pond was located in a deep, wooded valley miles from anywhere. With safe backstops of pond banks and valley walls, even a ricochet could not escape the confines. Headshots were always taken to assure the necessary job was efficiently accomplished.

On one particular day, I forgot to turn off the timer of the sewer system's air blowers. The units pumped air through a matrix of underwater pipes to oxygenate the water for the benefit of friendly sewage-eating microbes. While waiting for turtle heads to bob up out of the calm water, the units kicked on stirring the murky depths. That, in turn, caused the pleasant aroma of a hundred sunken and decaying turtles to fill the air. The smell was so bad that I had to leave. There was no relief until I got far away.

Isn't it interesting that Pharaoh considered it a relief to endure the stench of putrefied flesh? Rotten fish polluted the waters. Decaying frogs fouled his land. He was far from the healing balm of the Heavenly Father, who wishes to diffuse *the fragrance of His knowledge in every place* (II Corinthians 2:14). Pharaoh chose to relish in the aroma of death rather than in the fragrance of God. With his kingdom poised to decompose, like dead things do, he still felt relief. A hard heart will do that to a person.

There are times when we find ourselves in a condition of phony relief. The sin we embrace smells to high heaven, or really to the depths of hell, and still we act like nothing is amiss. We stumble along in a false sense of security hoping that the stinky air will clear itself. Surely, it is not because of me! We may not say those words out loud but we think them loud and clear.

The smell of sin will not go away until we deal with the cause of the odor. For Pharaoh, it was a matter of the heart. That's the message here: the condition of the heart in the presence of a Holy God – God, who WILL let you know that HE IS LORD.

There in His presence, the heart must be found pure. There, it must linger. There, it must long for the relief that only God can give. No other relief is possible. We only fool ourselves into thinking so. We spend too much time around our own smelly water and stinky land hoping for relief. Instead, we must spend our time at the cross where the forgiving power of Jesus purges the heart from the smell of death. For at His cross, the sunken and decaying carcass of stinky sin was overcome by the Aroma of Life.

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (I John 1:9). Seek relief in the Redeemer of the world. Don't get distracted by the odors of the world. A fragrant, healing balm awaits at the cross. And it smells oh, so good.

*There Is a Balm in Gilead*  
(Negro Spiritual)

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;  
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.  
Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain,  
But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.  
There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;  
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.  
If you can't preach like Peter, if you can't pray like Paul,  
Just tell the love of Jesus, and say He died for all.  
There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;  
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

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**Bible Devotions: Hook Line & Sinker (study guide)**

Exodus 7:17-18; 8:13-15  
Shooting Fish and Turtles

HOOK

1. In your view, what is the most unpleasant odor? What smells most pleasant to you?  
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2. Name one benefit of having turtles in a pond. Name one concern. Briefly discuss both.  
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3. Name three reasons why it is improper or unsafe to shoot into the water.  
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LINE

Isn't it interesting that Pharaoh considered it a relief to endure the stench of putrefied flesh? He chose to relish in the aroma of death rather than in the fragrance of God.

The smell of sin will not go away until we deal with the cause of the odor. For Pharaoh, it was a matter of the heart. That's the message here: the condition of the heart in the presence of a Holy God – God, who WILL let you know that HE IS LORD.

There in His presence, the heart must be found pure. There, it must linger. There, it must long for the relief that only God can give. No other relief is possible. We only fool ourselves into thinking so. We spend too much time around our own smelly water and stinky land hoping for relief. Instead, we must spend our time at the cross where the forgiving power of Jesus purges the heart from the smell of death. For at His cross, the sunken and decaying carcass of stinky sin was overcome by the Aroma of Life.

Describe the condition of your heart in the presence of a holy God. Be honest.

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What sin plagues your life the most? What distinguishes the aroma of death from the aroma of life? How will you seek relief from the smell of sin? Again, be honest.

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SINKER

Take a few minutes to write your thoughts on this devotional. Reflect on your own experiences.

Key words: relief                      aroma                      forgiveness

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