

God Remembers: I Will Pass Over You

Exodus 12:1-32

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Now let me invite you please to take a copy of God's holy and inerrant Word in your hands and turn to the book of Exodus, chapter 12; Exodus chapter 12 - page 53 in the church Bibles. Before we read, let's bow our heads as we pray.

If God is for us, who can be against us? If God would give up His own Son, how will He not also graciously give us all things? And so now, Abba Father, as hungry children of Yours, we come asking for Your Spirit's work by Your Word, standing on Your promise that You will graciously give us what we ask for the nourishment and joy of our souls and the glory of Your own great name, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Exodus chapter 12, reading from the first verse. This is the Word of Almighty God:

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

"Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet,

and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

"This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread."

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!"

Amen, and we praise God for His holy and inerrant Word.

The Gospel in the Passover

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam - Those are the opening words in Hebrew of the Passover Seder, giving thanks to God for His deliverance of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam* - "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe." And to this day, observant Jews all over the world remember their deliverance from slavery by keeping the feast first established by God in the chapters we'll be considering together this morning. It is of course one of the great tragedies of our age that the ancient people of God, the Jewish people celebrating the Passover, remain still largely ignorant of and hostile to the One to whom, as we'll see, this meal points them - the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. And indeed as we'll see, the narrative of the giving of the Passover is laden with rich, clear, Gospel themes. It preaches the good news about Jesus to us with great power. We read only a portion of the twelfth chapter a moment ago but we're actually going to be thinking about the message of chapters 11 through the middle of chapter 13 because they form a single large unit within the storyline of the book of Exodus.

A Pivotal Point for the People of God

And that ought to impress upon us the importance of their message. Until now, the history of God's dealings with Israel in the book of Exodus really has clipped along at quite a pace. Even the account of the first nine plagues which we considered together last Lord's Day, although it covers four substantial chapters of material, even that account is highly condensed as it reports what actually took place. Each plague often lasted several days and their implications stretched well beyond that. The first nine plagues occur over weeks and weeks but the narrative keeps us moving from one to the next to the next in rapid fire; it is a racy narrative, a racy retelling of what took place in Egypt as God began to judge the land. It's racy that is until we come to the tenth plague - the death of the firstborn. And here it's as though Moses, as he writes these words, presses a button and the action slows right down; we move into slow motion. Look at the attention this

tenth plague is given. In chapter 11, verses 1 to 3, God tells Moses what is about to happen. Then in chapter 11:4-10, Moses concludes his interview with Pharaoh and tells Pharaoh what is about to happen. Then chapter 12:1-13 Moses tells the Israelites what is about to happen and what they should do about it, and then 14 to 20 how they should remember what is about to happen in future years, then 12:21-43 the event itself takes place. And then in the second half of chapter 12 and the first half of chapter 13 we're back to further instructions on how to remember what has happened. So suddenly, do you see, everything is slowing right down. The whole is told in advance, then it's retold in advance, then it's told in real time, then it's told again looking back - over and over and over again.

This is not simply, therefore, the end; a period at the end of a sequence of ten plagues, the last in a list merely. This, is something else. This is a pivot point, not just in the book of Exodus but in the whole history of the people of God. It becomes the great paradigm, the archetype of God's salvation throughout Scripture. We've come in these chapters like world travelers to one of the great wonders of the Scriptures. As though we'd come to one of the wonders of the world, you don't simply fly past; you must stop and linger and drink it in. So let's take a look at the narrative together, shall we? I want you to notice three things in these chapters, chapter 11 verse 1 through chapter 13 verse 16. First of all we are taught here to see the Gospel, then secondly, heed the warning, and then thirdly, remember the cross. See the Gospel, heed the warnings, and remember the cross.

See the Gospel

First of all, see the Gospel. Look with me at the passage we read that is right at the heart of these chapters, chapter 12:21-42. The instructions that were first given to Moses himself in the first thirteen verses of this chapter are now repeated in summary form as Moses relays them to the elders of Israel. So verse 21, the Israelites are to take a lamb; verse 5 fills in some details for us. It is to be an unblemished lamb, either from the goats or the sheep, and they are to slaughter the lamb. The blood of the lamb would be collected and is to be daubed on the doorposts and on the lintels of each Israelite house using an improvised brush of hyssop leaves, verse 22. Verses 8 to 11 tell us that a meal using the roasted meat of the Passover lamb was to be eaten in a very particular manner with belt fastened, sandals on, staff in hand - ready to leave at a moment's notice. They were, we're told, to "eat in haste." The message, I think, is clear. Their departure at last from Egyptian bondage and slavery is about to take place in response to and is tied to the shedding of the blood of the Passover lamb. "Get ready," God is saying to them, "You're about to leave." And all that night no one was allowed outside their own home because, verse 23, "the Lord was about to pass through to strike the Egyptians. And when he sees the blood on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter the house to strike you." The Lord Himself was coming to

judge in the death of the firstborn in Egypt.

The Restraint of God's Judgment

Now just as an aside, some people object by saying that God Himself is being unjust here. It is, of course, an objection that overlooks and forgets the wickedness of Egypt that had itself, in the opening chapter of the book of Exodus, murdered the firstborn boys of Hebrew families. And what's worse, it's an objection that overlooks what every sin deserves - the wrath and curse of God. What's really perplexing, you know, about the narrative of the judgment and death of the firstborn, is the restraint of God, the restraint of God in the face of the pervasive sin festering in every human heart. What is extraordinary is what any are left alive, not that He judges some.

The Ground of Israel's Hope and Liberty

But the key point in our narrative that I want us to notice here is not simply that God will bring a terrible judgment on Egypt for its rebellion and sin. The text implies, doesn't it, that God would do the same for Israel too unless they complied with His instructions. Verse 23 again, "Put the blood on your doorposts and lintels. I am passing through to destroy and when I see the blood on the doorposts and lintels I will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. Israel is liable to the judgment of God equally with rebel Egypt. The great difference between them and the Egyptians has nothing at all to do with the superior righteousness of the Israelites compared to the wickedness of the Egyptians. God did not promise to spare Israel because they were sufficiently religious or moral in contrast and by comparison to their pagan oppressors. No, God promised to spare them only if the blood of the lamb marked their households. Only those under the lamb's blood would not face the wrath of God. There were no other grounds for hope in all the land of Goshen than this, that everyone take refuge under the blood of the Passover lamb.

And so that very night, as the judgment at last fell, every house in the land is afflicted except the houses of the Hebrews. And as a great cry and wail of anguish ascends throughout the whole land, Pharaoh finally summons Moses and Aaron, verse 31, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel. Go and serve the Lord as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds as you have said. Be gone and bless me also!" And in much the same way, the general population of Egypt were likewise desperately eager to be rid of the Hebrews at last, verses 33 to 36. Notice that at their request the Egyptians gave to the departing Israelites silver and gold jewelry, plundering the Egyptians. As the old saying goes, "To the victor belongs the spoils." These are the spoils of a war Israel did not fight. The Lord fought for them and His victory is complete. God's judgment on Egypt is total. Their gods are humiliated, Pharaoh is reduced to begging, and Israel leaves the land enriched with the treasure of their former captors. And now they're free at last and all because of the lamb's blood. The

lamb's blood was the ground of their liberty.

The Blood of the Lamb is Our Only Security

What a beautiful picture of the Gospel that is. The Passover pointed forward to a great Passover to come when the firstborn of neither pagan Egyptians nor believing Israelites died, but God's only begotten Son Himself was made subject to the destroying presence of the heavenly Judge. He became the sacrificial Lamb that took the place of His people. The Passover Lamb here points us to the person and work of Jesus. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been slain for us - 1 Corinthians 5 and verse 7. You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers not with perishable things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot - 1 Peter 1 and verse 19. When John saw Jesus coming towards him you remember his exclamation, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" - John 1 and verse 29. What are the great differentia marking out Christians from non-Christians when they stand before the white-hot fury of divine justice burning against our sin? Shall the Christian appear at the tribunal of heaven and point to his prayers perhaps, his service in the church, the Bible studies that he attended, the religious experiences that he enjoyed, the honest commitments that he has made? Shall the Christian point to some grand moment of crisis in his life and claim that as the basis for his security before the heavenly Judge? Shall he say to the Lord, "He made a decision and signed a card and walked an aisle and that must be the badge of his entry and his escape from hell's fury"? Is that the best we can offer by way of argument to gain entry to glory?

What's the only argument that will stand before God on that day? "Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul. Not what my toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole. Not what I feel or do can give me peace with God. Not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear my awful load. Thy work alone, O Christ, can ease this weight of sin. Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, can give me peace within. Thy love to me, O God, not mine O Lord to Thee, can rid me of this dark unrest and set my spirit free." This needs to be our argument - that you have come to hide under the blood of the Lamb. Like Israel in Egypt painting blood on their doorposts, you must take for yourself the blood of Christ offered at Calvary for sinners. Here is the Gospel. Can you see it? There is no qualification you can obtain, there is no work you can perform, there is no effort you can ever expend to secure for yourself acceptance with God - none! All there is to do, all you need do, all you may do is hide beneath the shed blood of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has done it all and His sacrifice is a refuge for any and all from the wrath of God on our sin. Are you living today under the blood of the Lamb? There is no hope anywhere else. See the Gospel.

Heed The Warning

Then secondly, heed the warning. The whole section of course begins back in chapter 11 with the interview between Moses and Pharaoh at the end of the ninth plague. The account, actually, is a continuation from the interview we read of in chapter 10 but it is interrupted in the opening three verses of chapter 11 to inform the reader that God had told Moses what was coming. It's almost like a flashback in a movie. The director interrupts the normal progress of time to flash back so that the viewer has the back-story in place before the story progresses in the present, and so verses 1 to 3 are a little aside to the reader showing us that God has already informed Moses that the tenth plague would be the decisive blow, that Israel after it would be free and they would plunder the Egyptians.

Then verses 4 to 10 the interview with Pharaoh resumes. Moses reports God's words to the king. "Thus says the Lord, 'About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die'" - verses 4 and 5. But do look at verse 7. "Not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, neither man or beast, that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel." So Egypt will be judged; Israel will be spared. Why did God have Moses tell Pharaoh all of that in advance? Well it was a warning of course, and a warning, if chapter 11 verse 10 is any measure, it is a warning Pharaoh utterly rejected and so judgment fell. But it wasn't that way with everyone living in Egypt. Turn over to chapter 12 verses 37 and 38. So here is the aftermath of the death of the firstborn. Pharaoh has refused the warning and judgment has now come. The Hebrews have been spared hiding beneath the blood of the lamb and they are at last free. "The people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children." And verse 38, note this - "A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock." A mixed multitude also went with them. Although Pharaoh didn't listen to the warnings of God, some people did. They saw His mighty works in judging Egypt and saving Israel, and while the rest of the population couldn't wait to be rid of the Hebrews, these it seems have recognized that Israel's God is the true God and the idols of Egypt are dumb, empty things. These, it seems, have come to recognize that safety and hope can be found only among the people of God under the rule of God and so they choose to depart their homeland with Israel rather than stay in Egypt under God's curse. Some people listened to the warning and were made participants in Israel's salvation.

There is Gospel mercy for sinners in the blood of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, but judgment is coming. So will you heed the warning and flee the wrath to come, as some did in our text, and found refuge with Israel under the lordship of Almighty God? There is no God like the Lord our God who defeats the impotent gods of Egypt by mighty works and who saves His people with the blood of a lamb. Are you going to heed the warning and find your only hope under the Lamb's blood?

Remember The Cross

See the Gospel, heed the warning, and then finally and very briefly - remember the cross. In chapter 12:14-28 and again chapter 12:43 verse 16 of the thirteenth chapter, God institutes the festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Unleavened Bread of course because the Israelites, according to verse 39, had no time for their bread to be leavened before they were thrust out of the land and so the roasted flesh of the lamb, the Passover lamb, and the unleavened bread became together the emblems, a perpetual memorial used annually in Israel by which they may remember God's great redeeming grace. It was, if you recall, this very same meal that Jesus took and transformed on that climactic Passover evening, the night in which He was betrayed. He took some of the unleavened bread and He took one of the cups of wine and He showed His disciples how it all points to Him, finds its ultimate significance in His person and in the work He was about to accomplish at the cross. "This is my body broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me. This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me." And so now you see, the Lord's Supper does duty for Passover in the life of the people of God. The supper speaks to us clearly about God's final redemption from the deepest slavery of them all, from the slavery of sin, by means of the blood of the true Passover Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Regular Reminders of Our Need For Jesus

But both meals, the Passover in the old covenant, the Lord's Supper in the new, teach the same thing. Their message is the same. Both were given to teach the people of God, then and now, we must never, never stray from the blood of the Lamb. God punctuates His people's calendar and builds into the rhythm of their lives, in Moses' day and in our day, a simple meal to ensure we come back again and again to the Lamb who was slain. These are God's ordained means, His mechanism, ensuring we never stray from Golgotha. The Lord's Supper was given to us to be used frequently to teach and remind us that the Christian life flourishes like some rare flower, only on the slopes of Calvary. And so we much always, always come back to Christ crucified. The Christian life flourishes like a rare flower only on the slopes of Calvary. Jesus gave us the sacraments of baptism that we celebrated earlier this morning and the Lord's Supper that we celebrated last Lord's Day Morning, to be means of grace to our souls, to teach us what it really means to sing day by day in true dependence on Jesus. "Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked come to Thee for dress; helpless look to Thee for grace. Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die." That's what the sacraments are designed to teach us - to create within us that disposition of utter dependence on Calvary and on the Lamb's blood.

How are you using the sacraments, brothers and sisters? Are you ensuring that you do not miss the Lord's Supper? Do you renew your own vows when you see a baptism? Is it a spectacle? Sentimental and cute and that is all? Or is it a solemn moment when you are reminded of your own engagements to live for Christ and you are shown again, placarded in the washing of water, what Jesus'

blood has provided for your soul so that you are melted anew with gratitude that He would be Your Redeemer? See the Gospel - come and find refuge under the blood of the Lamb. Heed the warning and join with the people of God - flee the wrath to come and join in the great salvation God has given. And remember the cross - never stray from the slopes of Calvary but learn to live your Christian life always within sight of Christ crucified, depending on Him, clinging to Him, drinking Him in, feasting by faith upon Him using all the means of God's ordination to help and strengthen and nourish your soul. See the Gospel, heed the warning, and remember the cross.

Let us pray together.

Our Father, we pray giving thanks for the Lamb of God who takes sin away by giving His life, by shedding His blood. Together now we run for refuge to hide beneath His sacrifice asking that His righteousness would cover all the stains of our rebellion and that we may know great deliverance like Israel of old from the ultimate bondage of our sin to the glory and praise of Your name. In Jesus' name, amen.

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