

Since we've taken two weeks off our Exodus series, let me offer a bit of review.

God hears the cry of His people in Egypt. He responds to their suffering by raising up Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery. Moses confronts Pharaoh and tells Him that God commands him to let His people go. But Pharaoh, thinking that he is a god himself, refuses to respect God's authority and says, no.

Prior to these events, the last time the Israelites heard from God was at least 200 years earlier. Some scholars think it may actually have been as much as 400 years. And remember, there's no written Bible at this point. The memory of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph was just that—a distant memory. That means, the only life the Israelites knew for generations was the rule of a dictator who people believed was a god. And the splendor of Egypt's breathtaking architecture, dazzling art, everything magnificent in gold, almost made it believable that he was. It was near impossible for the Israelites to not believe the Egyptian gods existed and exerted power over them.

We've already said it in this series, it was one thing to remove Israel from Egypt, but removing Egypt from Israel? That was much more challenging.

Which was one of the purposes of the ten plagues. To bring judgement to Egypt and Pharaoh's arrogance, God brought 10 devastating plagues. As much as the plagues were judgments against Egypt, they were also something of an elaborate exorcism for Israel. A means of casting out of the demons that had enslaved the Hebrew's imaginations so that they might see beyond Egypt's evil façade. God used them to purge the minds of the Hebrews of the illusion that these gods existed and held power over them.

There have been many attempts by biblical scholars to neatly connect each plague to one of the various gods of Egypt, but they don't lay out that neatly. It's easy to connect the plague of the river turning to blood to the Egyptian river god Hapi, and the plague of darkness to the Egyptian sun god Ra. But God's purpose wasn't simply to expose non-existent gods. God's purpose was to clarify who really was in charge. Not a river god, or a sun god, and certainly not Pharaoh. God's purpose was to demonstrate that He is the one true God.

This morning we're going to **focus on the final and most important plague, the Passover and the plague of the first born.** We need to take extra time on

this particular passage, especially because of its direct connection to our worship service today. There is a direct connection between this passage and the sacrament of communion. And here's my hope. When we take communion together in a few minutes, that you not only will have a much deeper appreciation for what Communion means, but also just how much God deeply love us. **I want to highlight three things: Lamb, Grace, and Table.**

First, let's talk about the lamb.

Turn with me to your Bible to Exodus 11:4.

⁴ So Moses said [to Pharaoh], "This is what the Lord says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. ⁵ Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. ⁶ There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. ⁷ But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any person or animal.' Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

After nine devastating plagues, Pharaoh says he's willing to let the Israelites go, but...he still wants them to leave behind their flocks and herds. Moses says, "No," and Pharaoh once again hardens his heart. He tells him to never come before him again. There will be no more negotiating. But before Moses leaves, he pronounces one final, devastating plague of judgment. The plague that would take the life of all first-born sons.

Then Moses went to the elders and told them what the Lord had said, Exodus 12:21:

²¹ Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. ²² Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. ²³ When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

Each family in Israel was to choose a perfect, spotless, male lamb. The head of the household was to slaughter that lamb, place its blood into a basin. Then use hyssop branches to apply the blood to top and then to the two side posts of their door. The blood would be a sign directing the Angel of Death to “pass over” that home.

Those of us who have been in the church for a while have become so familiar with this passage we no longer appreciate just how strange this request was. In the ancient world, it was common to offer an appeasing sacrifice to appease the gods—especially within Egypt. But take the blood and put it over your doorways? That was bizarre. I want you to imagine going home today and your neighbor seeing you spreading a little blood over your doorway. How’s that going to go over? It wouldn’t have been that much different in ancient Egypt. But having seen all the previous plagues, the Israelites knew better to question Moses.

In the 9 previous plagues, only the Egyptians were affected. But in this the 10th plague both the Hebrews and Egyptians were susceptible. In every household in Egypt that evening there would either be a dead lamb or a dead son.

Here's where this event offers us context today. The spreading of the lamb’s blood wasn’t only for this Exodus, where Moses would lead Israel out of slavery in Egypt. It was to prepare Israel for the much greater Exodus, that Jesus Christ would lead for the whole world out of slavery to sin and death. The only reason this original event makes any sense is because God was preparing Israel, and us, for the salvation of true lamb, Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 5:7 says:

Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Like the lambs that were chosen that fateful evening, Jesus also was a spotless lamb. He was without sin. And it was his blood shed on the cross that allows death to pass over all who trust in Him. God himself became the lamb that provided the substitute for us. All of us have rebelled against God. And the sentence for our rebellion is death. Not simply physically, but eternal separation from God. There had to be a substitute to avert the judgement of God. So, the Father offered His Son, so that none of us need be lost.

That's the lamb. Next, let's consider grace.

We tend to think about grace we tend to think of the New Testament, but that's a fallacy. God's grace is on full display in the Exodus.

Think about it. God did not tell Moses, "Here, I first want every Israelite to sign here on the bottom line and pledge your obedience to Me. Then I will deliver you out of Egypt." God's deliverance of His people was not a contract conditionally based on Israel's obedience. No, it was a covenant extended fully by grace. By complete unmerited favor.

And to make it clear, The Ten Commandments (which God will give after leaving Egypt) begin with this declaration: Exodus 20:2

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

Only after having saved His people does God declare at Mount Sinai, here is how you can return my love. God says, I delivered you out of Egypt. I have brought you salvation. I formed you as a people. Do you see how much I love you? And now, having seen my love, trust and obey me. I am not a tyrant like Pharaoh; I am your loving Father. Will you trust that I have your best interest in mind?

God's unconditional love always precedes the context for obedience. Never does our obedience precondition God's love. Moreover, God's love does not change based on our behavior. It is never conditional.

Think about how radical of a concept grace was for the people of Israel. All that they knew was the fickle, conditional nature of the supposed Egyptian gods.

Later Paul will write to the Romans, Romans 5:8,

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

God didn't say to the world, I will offer you salvation through my Son IF you obey me. In fact, God brought our salvation DESPITE what we have done...completely out of grace and love. Ephesians 2:8-9 states,

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It is by God’s grace that we have been saved. Not might be. Not “if you.” We have been saved. Out of God’s unconditional love—just like the Exodus. Now, it’s God’s love that liberates us from our enslavement to sin and now even makes it possible for us to obey him. God said to the Israelites and now to us, now that you have seen the extent of my love poured out for you on the cross, will you follow me? Will you obey me? Yes, there are good works for us to do. But these works do not merit our salvation. They are an expression of our love back to God for His love of us.

So, we’ve spoken about lamb and grace. Now let’s talk about the Table.

Not only was Israel to eat this special Passover meal the night of the 10th plague, they were to eat this meal every year as a way for all generations to remember the salvation that God brought to Israel. Exodus 12:24.

²⁴ “Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. ²⁵ When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. ²⁶ And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ ²⁷ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’”

So, here’s the question: if this is a lasting ordinance, why don’t we as Christians celebrate the Passover? Actually, we do celebrate the Passover.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he enjoyed one last supper with his disciples. But that supper wasn’t just any meal. The cups and the unleavened bread Jesus used that night were the elements of the historic Passover meal. As part of the meal, Jesus said, now when you see this bread, don’t only think of the unleavened bread that sustained you as you were freed from Egypt; now recognize that, “This is my body.” And as you partake of me and my divine life, I will sustain you unto eternal life. Now, when you see the cup, don’t simply think of the blood of the lamb shed so death would pass over your firstborn. Now see my blood shed for you and the many that will allow eternal death to pass over all

who trust in me. So, today, and whenever the church celebrates communion, we also celebrate a mini-Passover meal.

So, let's put all of this together.

The Lamb. In the past, God used the blood of a lamb on the doorframes to allow death to pass over. Now Jesus is the true Lamb who makes an eternal Passover possible.

Grace. God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt not because of anything special with them or even a promise of obedience. God freed them completely out of His love and grace. Today the same God has freed you and me from the slavery to sin and death. Not because of what we have done, but completely by grace.

Table. God instituted the Passover celebration, not only to help the Israelites remember the events of the Exodus, but to prepare them (and us) for what He would one day do in Christ. Just as He called Israel to a celebratory meal to remember the events of the Exodus, now God likewise commands us to have a celebratory meal to celebrate all that Jesus has done for us. All who participate in this life-giving meal of His life will one day experience a true Exodus. Not to Cana, but to our true and heavenly promised land.

So, this morning, do you realize just how **enslaved you are by the sin that infests** your life? Are you ready to **leave your personal Egypt behind**? God wants to take you on a personal Exodus, to free you from the sin that is entangling your life. In fact, He has already made that Exodus possible through Christ. Trust Him. Follow Christ and join the rest of us who are on this Exodus as we head to God's heavenly promised land.

If you do, by faith, come to this table and partake of the One who offers you true freedom. Who allows death to pass over you. Offer yourself to Him anew today. Come with deep appreciation for what Communion means, and just how much God loves you.