**THE LORD'S PASSOVER**

May 9, 2021

Exodus 12:1-13:16

Key Verse 12:27 – *“… 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,’ Then the people bowed down and worshiped.”*

In today’s passage, we witness how God saved His people Israel by the blood of lambs, foreshadowing what He would ultimately accomplish for the whole world through Jesus Christ.

When we last left off, God brought down His judgment upon Pharaoh, on Egypt and the Egyptian gods through nine devastating plagues to show Pharaoh and the world who the Lord is that we should listen to Him (Exodus 5:2). Each plague escalated in its intensity, bringing Egypt to the brink of destruction but in spite of all this, Pharaoh did not relent. Pharaoh hardened his heart even more and refused to submit to God’s will. All this needless suffering could have been avoided at any point if Pharaoh simply acknowledged God and repented of his sinful pride. Yet even in the face of total disaster, Pharaoh would not yield to the God of heaven and earth. His defiance and rage grew with each passing calamity to the point where he threatened to kill Moses the next time he even caught a glimpse of his face! (Exodus 10:27-28).

It was at that moment where Pharaoh crossed the point of no-return as Moses delivered God’s final judgment upon Pharaoh as follows; **“This is what the Lord says: ‘About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. 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. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. 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. All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, ‘Go, you and all the people who follow you!’ After that I will leave.”** (Ex 11:4-8) God Himself would go through the whole land and by the end of the night, every firstborn son would be dead.

What is most striking about this declaration is the sovereignty of God. Recall what God told Moses earlier at the start of Chapter 10:1-2; **“Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these signs of mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the Lord.”** God knew from the very beginning exactly what would take place. God told Moses exactly how things would go down because He was in control the whole time. God raised Pharaoh for this very purpose to further highlight His own almighty power and His enduring faithfulness to His people by creating the means for them to finally leave Egypt. Our Sovereign Lord is ruler of everything. God is always in control. He will always make a way to bring out His very best in every situation for all those who place their faith in Him. So never let the difficulties of your circumstance cause you doubt the sovereignty of your God!

With most of the other plagues, there was a clear distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites. Even with the ninth plague, the difference was literally night and day with the Egyptians mired in three days of total darkness while the illuminated Israelites went on as if nothing happened! But with the tenth plague, God’s judgment was upon every inhabitant of the land. But why? It is because God wanted to remind everybody, including the Israelites, that the thing they needed to be saved from most was not their slavery, nor their harsh living conditions nor their tyrannical ruler. What they needed saving from is God’s own wrath! We too need to be saved from the judgment and wrath of God because our death is the debt we owe to God because of our sins (Romans 3:23). Sin cuts us off from God. When Adam and Eve sinned against God in the Garden of Eden, they brought sin, death and ruin into God’s wonderful world. But the most tragic consequence was being eternally excluded from His presence (Genesis 3:23-24). To be separated from God is to be cut off from the very source of life and all that is good. So as dreadful as the plague of the firstborns was, it is but a tiny fraction of what the Lord could have done. God is well within His right to punish sin in the way He does because that is His sovereign right as our Creator!

Here is an example. A pastor was on his way to lunch one day. He went downtown and tried to park his car but because the town recently updated the parking system, none of the meters worked. Annoyed, he downloaded the app, put in his license number and went to have lunch. Guess what was on his car an hour later? That same week he went to town hall to dispute the ticket, full of anger at the grave injustice that befell him. But as he showed the ticket and the app on his phone to the lady at the counter, she asked him if that was indeed his license plate. He said “of course” and she asked him to check again. To the pastor’s horror, he saw he entered his number incorrectly. Sheepishly he calmed down, expecting to have to pay the ticket in full but the city was gracious in forgiving his fine and letting him off with only a warning. Justice would require him to pay the ticket but mercy allowed him to go free with a record wiped clean. That day, he was once again reminded of the grace and mercy God had upon him and upon us.

Our God is not only a god of justice but of rich and overflowing mercy. He willingly lavishes it upon all who come to Him. Even as His judgment rained down on the land, He gave people a way out from it. Look at Exodus 12:2-7, **“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family…The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses.”**

A few important things to note. Right off the bat God tells the Israelites that the Passover will be a moment in history so paramount that from then on, even their calendar and all the rhythms of their life would center on it for the rest of time. They were to start off every year by remembering how the Lord delivered them from Egypt and finally brought them to the land He promised them through their ancestors. This was to be their first and most important tradition as they made their transition from a nation of slaves to a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Our tradition of choosing a New Year’s key verse and writing a testimony on it comes from a similar desire to really set the tone for the whole year by meditating on what God has done in years past while looking forward to what we hope to see Him do in future.

It would be one thing if all they needed to do was sit back and just reflect on God passing over them but God added a physical dimension to their celebration that would foreshadow even greater things to come. The Israelites were to pick a year-old lamb without blemish or defect, welcome it into their home and lovingly care for it, only to then sacrifice it and paint its blood on the lintels and posts of their doors (12:2-7). The blood on their doors would serve as an indicator and a protective ward against the angel of death that swept all over the land that terrible night (12:12-13). Only by painting the blood on the door would God “pass over” their homes and spare them from His judgment, hence the name of the festival.

But some may ask *“Why slaughter such a cute and innocent lamb? Couldn’t the Lord have them do something else? Why was all this necessary?”* As the Lord said to Noah, the life of every living creature is in the blood (Genesis 9:5). Without blood, there’s no life. Therefore, for a life to be saved, something or someone must give up its blood in exchange. To save the firstborn, the lamb had to die. Blood for blood. Life for life. This is why there was no household in Egypt without a death in it (12:30). You either had a dead lamb or a dead son. God wanted to hammer home to the Israelites that their freedom from slavery would come at a great cost and serve as constant reminder of how sinful man stands before a righteous and just God. As Leviticus 17:11 says, **“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.”**

Furthermore, the Passover was to serve as a sign of obedience to the Lord. Verses 12:8-11 describe the manner in which they were to celebrate the Passover meal. They were to eat it in haste, fully prepared to leave Egypt that very night. For people who lived in Egypt for 430 years it seemed too good to be true. Would they finally be freed to go to the Promised Land after generation upon generation of longing and waiting? God’s answer to that was a giant “YES!” and He wanted His people to obey accordingly. Whenever you think of Middle Eastern cuisine, you think of meat marinating and roasting in a sweet cornucopia of flavours for hours upon hours. Instead, they had to quickly roast it with bitter herbs and eat it alongside bread with no yeast! There are practical reasons for the yeast-less bread (*matzo*). They had no time to wait around for it to rise so having no yeast made it much easier to pack and carry for the journey ahead. However, there is a deeper spiritual significance as getting rid of the yeast symbolized getting rid of all the false gods and spiritual influences they acquired in their time in Egypt. Much like matzo, the Israelites were meant to come out as unleavened people, humbly ready to obey the Lord and serve Him as His kingdom people. This is why the Lord made it a lasting ordinance that for the whole week of Passover, they were to eat bread with no yeast (12:17-20).

That night, God swept across the land as promised, striking down every firstborn son from the son of Pharaoh to the son of the lowliest slave. Only those who did as the Lord commanded were saved. The cries of anguish across the land were so great that even Pharaoh’s heart of stone was completely shattered and as he begged Moses and the Israelites to immediately leave the country (12:29-36). The Egyptians even gave the Israelites all the gold, silver and clothing they could ask for as the Lord made them act favourably towards the Israelites. Once again, the Lord showed His faithfulness to them by not letting them leave Egypt empty-handed but with riches beyond their wildest dreams.

There is a lot more I can say about the Passover but if you are to take one thing from this message, it’s that every single aspect of the Passover points us toward Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus, he could have called Him so many things. Instead, John proclaimed, **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). Jesus came into this world to free us from the slavery of sin and death by dying as a sacrificial lamb for our sins (Hebrews 2:14-17). Jesus poured out His precious blood for us to save and protect us from the wrath of God. He is the Firstborn among all creation who gave His life to redeem us all (Matthew 20:28). Jesus’ Last Supper was meant to evoke the first Passover and fill it with even more meaning. The matzo they broke signifying His body broken for us. The wine they drank signifying His blood poured out for us. But have you ever noticed that there is never any mention of a lamb, the very centerpiece of the ceremony, at the Last Supper? There was no lamb on the table because the Lamb was sitting at the table! In doing this Jesus became our Passover Lamb.

It is critical to remember that the only difference between those who were saved and those who perished that night was whether or not they applied the blood to the door. The way to escape God’s judgment was open and available to all. God’s greatest desire is for all of us to turn away from sin and fix our eyes on Him. As Ezekiel 18 attests; **“Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!”** (Ezekiel 18:23, 31-32) Even some of the Egyptians believed and were saved as evidenced by all the instructions God gave for how non-Israelites could participate in the Passover ceremony (12:43-51).

In that same vein, there are only two kinds of people in this world. There are those who look to the blood of Jesus as their eternal refuge and shelter and then there are those who reject His sacrifice believing there is not judgment or worse, they can escape His judgment by their own righteousness. So, which kind of person are you? This is the question we must ask ourselves every day. At different stages in my life, I always thought about what was the worst thing that could happen in my life. Failure school? Romantic failure? Unemployment? A broken friendship? Death of a loved one? But as I go on through life I feel more and more that the worst thing in life is be under His judgment. Yet in the midst of all this I can be filed with joy and life because Christ willingly laid down His life for me! I am no longer under His wrath but forever under His grace (Romans 5:17).

Christ saves you by His blood – not by anything in you or about you. It’s not about the quality of your living, speaking, acting, praying, etc. It’s not even about the “quality” of your own faith. It is solely about His blood. It’s the quality of His death, not the quality of your life. Your status with God both now and into all eternity is not down to how well you did in this life – it’s purely down to what He did for you on the cross. I pray we all may be covered by His blood, never forgetting the cost of our new life in Him. Let us live our lives in light of His great mercy and share all that He done for us for the generations upon generations to come.

**BIG IDEA:** The blood of Jesus is our one true refuge.