

THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

Wild (Part 4) | Exodus 12-13

On this World Communion Sunday, when followers of Jesus around the globe gather at tables to remember Christ's sacrifice, it is remarkably fitting that you and I are turning our attention to the amazing story found in Exodus 12 and 13.

For more than 400 years now, "the children of Israel" have been on a bad slide. Once a highly favored people within Egyptian society, they are now enslaved to ruthless masters who use them and abuse them. Their overlords pile unmeetable expectations upon them. They distract them with appeals to put their faith in worthless idols. The rulers of Egypt make it harder and harder for the Jews to remember that they are actually children of a famous family and heirs of a fabulous promise. By the time we meet them in Exodus 12, the Hebrew people have largely lost the things all of us need to thrive -- a sense of identity, belonging, purpose and hope.

Which moves me to an important observation for each of us. In every generation, God's children are in danger of becoming enslaved to some EGYPT – some system of temptation, distraction and destruction that inclines them to forget who and whose they are. It happened to the Israelites. It's happened to a lot of other people throughout history. We need the Christian communion – to be in conversations like this -- so that you and I retain and refine our sense of identity, belonging, purpose and hope.

The good news in this story is that God has seen all of this – as He sees what afflicts you and me today -- and he has a heart to help his people (Exo 3:7-8). So God carefully prepares and calls a messenger named Moses to go to Pharaoh (the king of Egypt) and tell him that the one Great God says: **Let my people go** (Exo 8:1).

Pharaoh is not fazed in the slightest. He doesn't recognize much less fear Moses or his God. It's as if a representative from the tiny island of Guam comes to the U.S. President and says: My LORD thinks you should re-organize your economy because people he cares about are suffering. Pharaoh simply scoffs. He thinks of himself as the LORD of all things. If he has any kind of spirituality at all, it involves giving service to all kinds of mini-gods who bear a striking resemblance to the idols people still go chasing after today. It's easy to become like Pharaoh. We are all subject to making ourselves the center and trying to build ourselves up by chasing idols that don't actually have the power to deliver what we most need. What are the idols you and I serve?

So, God brings upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians a succession of plagues. As Charlie and Mark did a great job of unpacking last week, each plague is designed to show that GOD is actually Lord over all the dimensions of life that Pharaoh thinks that he or his self-serving gods own. (God is out to show everybody enslaved to the Egypt worldview (and all of us get pulled in that direction) that if we are looking for a truly dependable

center and power for our life, **GOD is the LORD**. I wish that statement or the pleasures and plagues that come our way in life were enough to make us put God at our center. But it doesn't always work that way, does it?

Calamities have a way of momentarily loosening our sense that we are the CENTER or that our idols are trustworthy. In Exodus, we see how Pharaoh momentarily turns a bit toward God after each plague. But then, when God relents, he goes back to his normal, self-centered mode, further tightening his grip upon his throne. How often does this happen in your life and mine? We go through a time of suffering or loss and for a moment we get vulnerable and malleable. We turn to God and start to change in positive ways. But then life lightens up and we go back to normal.

Let's just pray that in order to really bring about the transformation he seeks in us, God won't have to do something to us like he then went on to do in the life of Pharaoh and his nation. You can read all about it in Exodus chapter 12 and 13. To finally FREE his people (and maybe even to liberate Pharaoh and the Egyptians from their idolatries too) God sends a tenth and final plague – and this last calamity is a whopper – a plague so devastating it HAS to produce change.

Have you ever heard the statement that: Freedom isn't free? I found an example of this idea in my email inbox this week. It came in the form of an ad for Visa's new "FREEDOM Unlimited" card. I saw this and I said: "REALLY?" I can conveniently apply right NOW. There's NO annual fee. I will earn \$200. What a deal! And then I started to look closer. I found that I could APPLY NOW, only by filling out this long form in which I give away a lot of my personal information to whatever agent is at the other end of that weblink. I discovered that while there's truly no Annual Fee, my FREEDOM card does carry fees for balance transfers, cash advances, late payments, and return payments. I learned that after an initial period my FREEDOM card will come with a nearly 30% annual interest rate for unpaid purchases. And, yes, I can earn that FREE \$200, so long as I spend \$500 in the first three months.

Now, don't get me wrong: I'm not saying this is a rip-off. It might even be a good deal, when you consider the benefits you get if you're willing to pay the related price. And this is true in lots of areas of life. You probably know people who are FREE to wear skimpy clothes in the summertime that display their flat stomachs. We don't like those people, but we know them! Chances are that they paid a considerable PRICE for that freedom in the form of sit-ups, planks or Pilate's classes. Quite a few of us have vocational freedom. We have liberty to structure our own schedules or to go from one company or organization to another. But that's only because somebody paid some hefty tuition bills or did a lot of homework or poured out great effort along the career path.

I've been watching the Ryder Cup this weekend. I'm in awe of the graceful freedom with which those players swing a golf club. Their movement is just so fluid and powerful. I think: I wish I had that gift. But when I really think, I realize that it's not

just a gift. Behind the beautifully free swing of those golfers lies ten thousand hours of practice I've never put in. It's often said on Memorial Day or on the Fourth of July: Freedom isn't free. It comes because SOMEBODY pays a price. The larger the freedom, the larger the price. Or conversely, the bigger the BONDAGE, the bigger the PRICE that must be paid to free someone from it. And if you and I don't get this, then we'll never get the way life really works, or what happens next in the Book of Exodus, or the even more magnificent event toward which it points.

Exodus 12 begins with these words: **The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year (Ex 12:1-2).** God is effectively saying: Moses and Aaron, pay attention. I am about to say and do something so BIG that I want you to reset your calendar according to it. And, then, God goes on to give the instructions that will become the basis for what will become known as "The PASSOVER," the fulcrum of Jewish history. In the remainder of chapter 12, God tells his people to select a young male lamb or goat **"without defect" (Ex 12:5),** sacrifice him, and then paint the top and side-frames of the front door of their homes with the blood of that sacrifice.

God goes on to say: **On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you (Ex 12:12-13).** By these three stripes, you will make the message clear: The people of this house live under the blood of the lamb. They have made a sacrifice to atone for their sins. And I, the Lord God, will spare them when – just as Pharaoh once ordered the death of all the male children of Israel -- I exact the sacrifice of all the firstborn of Egypt.

As some of you know too dearly, there is no pain even close to losing your child. It is, therefore, not surprising that when the angel of the Lord passed over Egypt and took the life of every firstborn not living under the Blood of the Lamb, it made an everlasting imprint on the Jewish people and finally changed Pharaoh like the nine previous plagues had not. The Bible says that: **During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested" (Exodus 12:31).**

In Exodus 12, God says: **This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance (Ex 12:14).** For centuries after that cataclysmic event in Egypt, the Jews fulfilled this order. Whether wandering through the wilderness, settled in the Promised Land, or living in Exile, the children of Israel gathered annually to remember how God saved and freed his people through the sacrifice of a precious lamb. It was the sacrament that reinforced their sense of identity, belonging, purpose and hope. Every

year and wherever they happened to be, the Jews came to the Passover table to remember that their salvation and freedom had come only at a very great price.

But I realize now that the Passover was not only a statement about God's presence with his people; it was also a pointer. The blood of the lambs of Israel... the blood of the firstborn of Egypt... were pointing us toward a hill outside Jerusalem where another lamb without defect, another precious Son, would be sacrificed. This time, however, God would not give human beings the punishment that their sins deserved; He would become the sacrificial lamb himself. Why? Because the price required to free human beings from bondage to sin and death was so large that no ordinary lamb, no merely human son, not even millions of them would be enough to pay it. He would have to do it himself. But that sacrifice made on the Cross was SO BIG that it paid the price to FREE not just one people but all people who put their trust in Him.

The brilliant Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, once said that the chief problem of humanity is that we have forgotten with what a GREAT LOVE we have been loved. So many of us are mastered by anxiety and fear. But if we would only REMEMBER God's LOVE and his sacrifices on our behalf... if we would only let Him become our true center... it would fill us with a new sense of our identity, belonging, purpose and hope, even over death, that no adversity and no Adversary can overcome.

As we come to the Communion Table today, I invite you to think deeply about how great a price God has been willing to pay to purchase your freedom from the penalty of sin and death and with what a great love you have been loved. Strengthened by that, I challenge you to walk out of EGYPT today. Leave behind whatever idolatries, whatever false worldviews, whatever destructive patterns may have bound you in the past. I urge you to invite other people, longing for freedom, to journey with you and encourage them on the road. Let the massive sacrifice that Christ made for you on the cross, inspire you to make the smaller sacrifices that communicate great love to the people in your life. And know that wherever you walk in days ahead, the Lord God goes before you.

Thus, Exodus chapter 13 concludes: **So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea... By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night (Exo 13:18-19, 21).**

Let's pray together...

Thank you, God, for the Blood of the Lamb... for the price you paid to purchase our freedom... and for all the possibilities of a new and more beautiful life ahead. If there are any of us who have never before truly opened our hearts to you and accepted the gift of forgiveness you offer, we do that today... acknowledging you as our Savior and asking you to be our Lord. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.