

Title: God frees his people
Text: Exodus 11-12

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Last week we looked at the first nine plagues that God sent against Egypt, and does anyone remember what the second plague was? First came the Nile, then came frogs. God sent the frogs everywhere...in the palace, in the bedrooms, their ovens, their kneading troughs...everywhere. I preached that message on Sunday. Monday morning, I am at work, it's about 9:00 a.m., and Keren sends me this **video**. Take a look. He is a crazy little boy. I hope that the frog was not a sign from the Lord! Today, as we continue our series in Exodus, we come to a high point in the story that is unfolding. God's people have been slaves for more than 400 years. God promised to set his people free. Pharaoh said no way. So God sent plague after plague against Pharaoh and Egyptians to reveal his majesty and might, to convince them to bow to his will. But no matter what they witnessed, Pharaoh refused to surrender. He refused to submit to God but rather hardened his heart. The intensity of the plagues increased to the point where we are at today, the last and final plague—the plague on the firstborn sons. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Exodus 11. **11:4-6 4 So Moses said, “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.**

So God says he is going to claim the lives of the firstborn sons throughout Egypt. Which is not just an expression of judgement but of *justice*. Do you remember how this book begins? In chapter 1, what did the Egyptians decide to do in order to reduce the population and the potential threat of the Israelites? They killed all of their sons. Now that violence has turned back on their own heads, they have to swallow their own medicine. The punishment they gave to others they are about to receive. You think killing children is a good idea? What about when those children are in your own cribs?! This 10th plague will be the last straw, the one that will ultimately break Pharaoh's back and convince him to finally set God's people free. After this plague, God's people, who have been slaves for 400 years will finally be delivered!

12:1-2 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 2 “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. This is a pretty cool command. Nowadays, we live in a very globalized world, and people from all around the planet are on the same calendar, the Gregorian calendar, which was put into effect in 1582 under Pope Gregory VIII. When you say it's September 22, everyone around the world knows what you mean. But it wasn't always that way. Up until the 16th century, every culture had their own unique calendar. They had their own way of tracking time, of remembering the past and preparing for the future. And as slaves in Egypt, the Israelites would have been running on Egyptian time. They would have used an Egyptian calendar. But as God sets his people free, he wants to give them a new calendar, a new way of telling time. So he says, “This month, *the month when you were delivered*, is to be for you the first month, the first month of the year.” God wanted his people to begin every year by remembering that at one time they were once slaves, but by his grace, they have been set free.

Every year begins by remembering the redemption of God. Redemption became their anchor, their compass, their north star! It reminds me of my good friend Rod Butler. Every year on August 24, 2012, he sends me a text with two pictures. Here's the first: that's he and I standing in the baptistry together. I met this man at Target. We chatted for a while in the aisle. Months later he comes to church and says: I'm ready to fully and finally surrender my life to Jesus. God has transformed this man's life. That's the first picture; this is the second, that's his baptism certificate. What's Rod doing every year when he sends me these pictures? He's not telling time based upon what his birth certificate says. He's not telling time based upon what the Gregorian Calendar says. He's telling time based upon the grace of God.

In Exodus, God promised to set his people free. And he gave them a very special and symbolic ceremony to participate in. He says **12:3 3 Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household ...6-7 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.** Now the lambs were to be one year old, spotless, male sheep. They were chosen on the 10th day of the month and lived with the family for four days. If you have ever seen kids around a pet, you know that's more than enough time for there to be a sense of attachment and belonging. And then after several days... they were to kill the lamb. The entire lamb was to be used. They were to cook and eat all the meat, and they were to spread the blood on the doorframe of their house. Look at **12:21-23. 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.** As you can tell, this wasn't a clean, tidy domesticated process. In the movie *The Prince of Egypt*, in the original script, when they were trying to tell this story, they had the Israelites just making a small little mark on their doors to indicate they were God's people. They didn't want to include blood and offend their young audience. When the screenwriters presented that idea to a group of Rabbis, the Rabbis said, "You have entirely missed the point! There has to be blood." The Bible says: "*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*" The Israelites didn't take a red sharpie and draw an x over the door frame. They slaughtered a lamb (DOORFRAME) and took the blood and placed it on the top and the sides of the entryway to their house.

When God came through Egypt, he saw the blood of the lamb, and he passed over that house. And the name of that became "*Passover*," because God passed over the Israelites and set them free from Egypt. Once the door frame was covered in blood of the lamb, the people inside the house gathered around their table and ate the Passover supper. Listen to the requirements God had for it: **12:8-11. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. 9 Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. 10 Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. 11 This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your**

hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover. There are several components of the Passover supper: (1) The entire lamb had to be consumed. They were to see the lamb as precious and valuable; none was to go to waste. (2) They were to eat it with bitter herbs. When we eat meat, we usually put salt and pepper and other spices on it in order to make it taste as delicious as we can. They ate bitter herbs, and as it offended their senses, it was to remind them of the bitter sting of slavery they had been subjected to generation after generation. (3) Finally, they were to eat it quickly. They were commanded to eat bread without yeast, because they wouldn't have time for the yeast to rise. It has to be unleavened bread. They were to eat with their cloak tucked into their belts, their sandals on their feet and strapped up, and with their staff in hand. All of this was a way of indicating that when they ate this meal, they were anticipating deliverance to come at any second. They couldn't afford to just lounge around and take their sweet time, because in an instant they could get the word, and they would flee Egypt, never to return to their slave quarters again.

This meal was so important they celebrated it every single year. Every year, during the first month of the year, they ate this meal in the exact same way that they did on that very first Passover. They had a lamb, ate bitter herbs, they ate bread without yeast, so they would always remember that night and what God did for them. **12:24-27...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.'** Later on in **Exodus 13:8**, Moses tells the people, **"On that day tell your son, I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt."** They ate this meal as they began every year, so that they would never forget the deliverance of God. Decade after decade, century after century, this meal became a pivotal part of Hebrew life. And every time they ate it they remembered what God did to set them free. And this is one of three feasts where the Bible actually commands all adult men to journey to Jerusalem, to celebrate the feast in the presence of the Lord.

Now this event first took place over a thousand years before Christ. But do you know that Jesus ate this meal, too. If we fast forward over a millennia from when this meal first happened, and we leave the book of Exodus and journey all the way to the book of Matthew, this is what we'll see: Jesus is in the third and final year of his public ministry...And what time of the year do you think it is? For the Jews, the new year has just begun. Passover is about to happen. Even though Jesus was from Nazareth, he is not going to go home for the holidays. Where is he going to go to celebrate Passover? Jerusalem! An ancient historian named Josephus says that around Passover, there were hundreds of thousands of lambs that were brought into the city for the festival. This year, there would be a lamb entering the city unlike any other before or since.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, we read in Matthew 26:17 **"The disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"** Jesus is going to eat this meal with his followers. And when he does, he instills an entirely new meaning to it. 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. **The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying,**

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Did you realize that when Jesus said those words, he was eating the Passover feast? And while eating the Passover, saying those words about his body and his blood, Jesus took a meal that the people of God had been eating and celebrating for over a millennia and said, in no uncertain terms: This meal is about me. Think about that statement. It was one of the boldest and most audacious claims anyone could ever make. The pinnacle moment of the entire nation, a commemorative meal that the Jews had been eating on one particular night, in one particular way for more than one thousand years, a meal that symbolized their freedom and deliverance...and Jesus says, it’s all about me. This bread without leaven, it’s my body. This wine, it’s my blood.

For all those years, when every Jewish family ate the meal together, the fathers would tell their children, we do this because many years ago, God set us free by the blood of a lamb. We do this to remember that has God redeemed us. And now Jesus tells his followers, when you eat this meal, instead of remembering the Exodus, remember me! Instead of remembering your deliverance when Egypt’s firstborn sons died and you were spared, remember your deliverance when God’s firstborn son died and you were spared. People want to look back at Jesus and say, “He was just a good teacher. He was just a good man.” Are you kidding me! Jesus never left us that option. He claimed to be the centerpiece, the focal point, and the climax of an entire nation. He said everything that had happened in Israel’s history, from the days of Abraham all the way up until that very moment were all pointing to him! He either was a delusional, ego-centric megalomaniac, or he was actually the messiah whom God sent to save the world.

And in the Passover meal that Jesus eats with his disciples - this is utterly fascinating. In all four gospels, each of which recounts Jesus eating the meal with his disciples, do you know the one element from the meal that is never mentioned in the gospels? The lamb. When Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John talk about the Passover, they never mention of the lamb. How interesting is that? The lamb was the central component of the meal. It was the entree, the main dish. And it has rich symbolic meaning. Why would they leave it out? At this Passover meal, the lamb is not on the table - the lamb is at the table.

And that sets the stage for what is to come. During the Passover meal, after he washed his disciples feet and called them to love one another as he has loved them, after eating the meal, they watched as Judas snuck out of the house and found the leaders of the Jewish people, the men who had been looking for a way to kill him for three years now. Judas promised to deliver Jesus into their hands for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave. Jesus and his disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Before long, Judas with 600 soldiers gave the signal: a kiss from a friend. The soldiers surrounded him to arrest him, and Peter lunged with a sword and cut off one man’s ear. Jesus told his disciples to restrain themselves, to sheath their weapons, *“those who live by the sword will die by the sword.”* Then he picked up that man’s ear and put it back on the man’s head. A gesture of kindness to a man who wanted to kill him. And with that, Jesus was led off, as it says in the prophets, *as a sheep to the slaughter.*

Over the next few hours he stood trial six different times, listening to false accusations brought against him by men who were paid under the table for their testimony. Ultimately, out of political convenience for Pilate, Jesus was ordered to be flogged and crucified. He was taken to the barracks, stripped of his clothes, and then beaten to within an inch of his life. Tacitus, a

Roman historian from the 1st century, tells us that flogging was so severe, 6/10 men died in the process. Jesus had been pulverized, but he survived. Then he was jokingly worshipped as the King of Jews, spat upon, and paraded into the streets as they led him to Golgotha, the place of the skull. There, Jesus was nailed to the cross. The crowds who walked by mocked him. Jesus forgave them. They were relentlessly cruel. Jesus, until his final breath was relentlessly compassionate. As the hours passed, the blood and life began to run out of Jesus' body.

(CROSS) On the cross, he bled from his head because they placed a crown of thorns on his brow. He bled from his hands because of the nails they drove into him. He bled from his back because of the flogging and his side because of the spear. He bled from his feet because of the nails driven between them. Why did this happen? Why all this blood?! 1 Corinthians 5:7 says “**Christ is our Passover lamb.**”

During the first Passover, God's people in Egypt weren't saved because they were any better than the Egyptians. They weren't saved because they were more moral or more polite or more worthy. They were saved by one thing and one thing alone: the blood of the lamb. The same is true today. The message of the cross is not that those who try hard will be saved. It is not that those who are religious will be saved. It is not that those who go to church or who serve with a charity, or who give their money, or who don't struggle with addictions will be saved. No, the message of the cross is that we are saved by the blood of Christ, our Passover lamb. Because he was forsaken, we can be forgiven. Because he absorbed the wrath of God, we can be adopted into the family of God.

The cross is our anchor. This is our compass. This is our north star. This is how we tell time. The calendar is divided right down the middle of history with this cross! B.C. Before Christ. And A.D. Anno Domini...in the year of our Lord, our calendar is marked by redemption. We tell time by the blood of the lamb, who died to set us free. Let's take a moment, stand together as a church family, and praise God for the price he paid for our salvation.