Remembering What God Has Done

Exodus 12:43-13:16
Key Verse: Exodus 13:8
On that day tell your son, "I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt."

Good morning everyone. Thank you for coming, it is very good to see you all in person. This is the first Sunday back since the pandemic began. And even now we have restrictions on how many of us can meet together. Can you believe it, the last time we met was March 8, 2020, it feels so long ago? So, thank God that we can begin to meet in person. Hopefully the delta variant resurge will not lock us down again.

First off, I would like to say that this is a weird passage for us to start the semester with. We were planning to start the school year off with last week's passage, from Psalms 1, but things change, and the school pushed us back a week. If it's one thing we learned through the pandemic is that we must be flexible and ready to change, adapt and overcome.

Next Monday, we get to celebrate Labor Day. It's often seen as the end of summer and the beginning of the new school year, with family barbeques and back-to-school sales. But as we know, this holiday, like so many others, has a deeper meaning. Labor Day was signed into law on June 28, 1894, and it pays tribute to American workers for all their contributions and achievements in our nation's history. The men and women who founded it, fought tirelessly for workers' rights. They were looking for two things: a means of unifying union workers and a reduction in work time. And we can thank them for the eight-hour workday and five-day work week that we have now. Before that, workers worked twelve-hour days seven days a week. So, when we celebrate Labor Day it's a way to say thank you for having a better work-life balance.

Thinking about holidays, did you know that all but two nations in the world celebrate a liberation or Independence Day? Can you guess which two don't? Only Denmark and the United Kingdom do not. In contrast, there are like 60 countries that celebrate independence from the United Kingdom. In America, we have many holidays but twelve of them are declared federal that we celebrate nationally all together. Among them are Martin Luther King Jr. Day, President's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas to name a few. We had a new one created just this year called Juneteenth and one is in dispute, Columbus Day some are calling Indigenous Peoples Day. The reason I bring up the topic of national holidays is because in our passage this morning, we see that God is going to establish Israel's first national holiday. There are 197 countries that celebrate some form of liberation or Independence Day and in a sense, The Passover, is Israel's Independence Day from Egypt.

This morning we are resuming our study of the book of Exodus. How many of you have studied the book all the way through before? The book of Exodus is famous because it records many events such as, the Exodus, the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments, the

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golden calf and many others. And our passage this morning takes place right after the ten plagues finish and Moses and the Israelites are about to leave Egypt for the first time. But before they leave, God gives Moses some departing words and instructions for their people to follow. To commemorate this historical event, the Lord gives the Israelites their first national holiday to celebrate; the Passover. Let's take a look at the first part of our passage in verses 43 to 45. "**43** The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "These are the regulations for the Passover meal: "No foreigner may eat it. **44** Any slave you have bought may eat it after you have circumcised him, **45** but a temporary resident or a hired worker may not eat it."

Celebrating the Passover was a blessing to the people of Israel, because it would be good to remember what God had done for them, they were being set free from their bondage to slavery in Egypt. But they couldn't celebrate it any old way THEY wanted, they had to do it the way God instructed. The first topic God talked about had to do with the rules and regulations of the Passover.

And the first rule that is stated is that no foreigner could celebrate it. Here the word for foreigners could be thought of as "those not part of the covenant community" maybe outsiders could be a suitable translation. This isn't racial or ethnic or some other type of discrimination, it's more about a matter of faith. If they were of the same faith, those that know God personally, they have the right to participate, but those who do not, they couldn't participate. It's like a person that doesn't have a valid driver's license doesn't have the right to drive on public roads. So, if a foreigner wanted to celebrate it, they needed to come to know God first, and be circumcised and then they could participate in the celebration.

This may sound strange to us, to start off the celebration with this kind of restriction, but God had his reasons. From the last passage of Exodus, we studied in chapter 12, we're told that as the Israelites were leaving Egypt, many other people left with them (12:38). Those people were foreigners, meaning they didn't know God personally, so they weren't part of the Abrahamic Covenant, therefore, they had no right celebrating the Passover. And actually, later on these people were going to cause some trouble in the community.

One thing we notice, is that the Passover wasn't restricted by social status. In fact, all of Israel's laws were class free, in contrast to the laws of their contemporary nations. So, no matter where you were in the hierarchy, a master, servant or slave anyone could participate. And one indication of being a member of the covenant community of God was being circumcised, therefore males had to be circumcised in order to participate. It didn't matter if you were a native-born Israelite or not; if you were circumcised then you're in. On the other hand, if you were circumcised, it would be disobedient if you didn't participate.

Verses 46 to 49 tell us how the Passover must be eaten. Let's take a look. "**46** "It must be eaten inside the house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones. **47** The

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whole community of Israel must celebrate it. **48** “A foreigner residing among you who wants to celebrate the Lord’s Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat it. **49** The same law applies both to the native-born and to the foreigner residing among you.”” From these verses, it's clear that the Passover should be celebrated family by family in their homes. This way families could have fellowship, rejoice together and build each other up. It would be more intimate and help families make deeper bonds. It would be easier for them to block out any external distractions. Also, they shouldn’t take it to another place but finish it in their house. There was a special note that they shouldn’t break any of the bones while preparing the meal. This didn’t have anything to do with contamination or anything like that, rather this was God’s desire that the lamb adequately symbolizes the body of Christ crucified who didn’t have any of his bones broken. The Israelites were called to think of themselves as a unified body, which was symbolized by a common meal. Eating together is an expression of unity and fellowship, and that is something that I really miss during the pandemic is eating lunch after Sunday worship with our fellowship.

And then in verses 50 -51, we see how all the people follow God’s instruction. “**50** All the Israelites did just what the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. **51** And on that very day
the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.”

In the next section we see the consecration of the firstborn in verses 1-2. “**13** The Lord said to Moses, **2** “Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal.””

Dedication of the first fruits wasn’t a new concept. We can see it all the way back in Genesis 4, we remember the story of Cain and Abel who both make an offering to God, but there is a distinct difference between their gifts. Cain brings some fruit and vegetables—probably something he had left over after he had eaten. But Abel brought the best of what he had to God—the firstborn of the flock, the healthiest of his animals. God noticed this difference in these sacrifices, and he had a clear preference between the two. Through this we learn a valuable lesson, giving our firstfruits means giving our best to God. It means sacrificing something that costs us something. It means putting God first, even before ourselves, or our family. Giving a first fruits offering opens us up to allow God to work in our life. When we approach God with open hands—rather than clenched fists—it makes it easier for him to give us more to work with. This reminded me of King David who would not sacrifice something that cost him nothing. (2 Sam 24:24) Because a sacrifice that costs you nothing is not a sacrifice at all. We can see the concept of giving our firstfruits to God scattered through the Bible. Proverbs 3:9 tells us “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops.” And the prophet Ezekiel said, “The best of all the firstfruits and of all your special gifts will belong to the priests. You are to give them the first portion of your ground meal so that a blessing may rest on your household.” (Ezekiel 44:30) If we give our best to God, he blesses us in return. And in Romans we see, “If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.” (Romans 11:16) What started as a specific instruction for bringing crops to the temple priest was expanded on later in Scripture. It no longer

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refers to literal fruit—firstfruits means any income, wealth, or blessings that we've received.

What does it mean, in our time, to consecrate our firstborn? To consecrate something means that we declare it sacred, and set it apart, or dedicate it, to the service of God. Therefore, when we consecrate our firstborn, what we are really doing is dedicating them to God. When my first child was born, I gave him the name of David Andrew, because I hoped that he would become a man after God's own heart (meaning - he would love God, like King David), and that he would be a man of possibility (meaning – he would view the world as anything is possible with God, like when Andrew brought his 5 loaves and 2 fish to feed the 5000). So that he would be a good shepherd for his siblings. So, in a sense I was dedicating him to God. And when you think about it, Jesus was God's first fruits—his one and only son, and the best that humanity had to offer. God gave Jesus up for us, in the same way that we sacrifice the best we have for him.

Moses told the people to "Remember this day…" to live in the moment because they were witnessing history. Take a look at verses 3-7. "**3** Then Moses said to the people, "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the Lord brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast."**4** Today, in the month of Aviv, you are leaving. **5** When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites—the land he swore to your ancestors to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey—you are to observe this ceremony in this month: **6** For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the Lord. **7** Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders." The Israelites hadn't even left Egypt and Moses was already telling them to mark the day because it will be significant, historical as they were about to experience freedom. This was the birthing of a nation happening right in front of their eyes. It kind of reminds me of the American revolution as it was happening in front the people's eyes. God also set the appointed time for them to celebrate it. Aviv means spring, so this is the month of spring, and is considered the first month, so that was when they should hold their festivals. They were to celebrate the Passover for a week. Our Thanksgiving is only two days, they get a week. Also, they were to celebrate without having any yeast. Bread without yeast is not very appealing. So even though it was a celebration, they were to remember how difficult it was.

Also, God wanted them to pass this tradition down to their children, and their children's children. Take a look at verses 8-10. "**8** On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' **9** This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that this law of the Lord is to be on your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. **10** You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year." Practically what does this mean? It's not like a simple baptism party, but it is a continual process to teach their kids daily, weekly about who God is and what he did for them. And notice that they were to tell them in the first person, "I do this…" because God wants every Israelite to

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have a personal connection to the exodus and to God. They were to give their children their personal testimonies of why they do what they do. They should have clear conviction of what they believe and why. God wanted them to celebrate the Passover year after year. Something that I find kind of funny about verse 9, is that they took it literally which lead to the practice of writing verses down on paper and keeping them in little boxes they would tie around their head, like a bandana, and on their left arm. These were called Phylacteries.

In the last section we see the redemption of the firstborn. Let's take a look at verses 11-16. "**11** "After the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your ancestors, **12** you are to give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the Lord. **13** Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons. **14** "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. **15** When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt. This is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.' **16** And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand." Because God rescued Israel from Egypt with the last plague, the plague of the first born, where all the first-born offspring in Egypt died, at the same time God spared the lives of all Israel's first born, God declared that from that day forward "The first offspring of every womb" belongs to God, and in cattle it was specifically the "firstborn males" that were his. A firstborn animal could not simply be kept from God for one's own use—either for working or for eating. It belonged to God. However, God didn't want to keep either the firstborn human babies or animal babies away from his people's homes and families, so he made a way that they could be redeemed by payment of a substitute.

The criteria was that the firstborn males of normally edible animals (goat kids, lambs, oxen,—whatever was considered a proper food animal) were given to God as offerings, whereas the firstborn of humans and the firstborn of male animals used for work but not for eating. In the case of a donkey, a non-firstborn lamb was an appropriate substitute (since all firstborn lambs must be given to God and none held back to serve as redemption substitutes). For children the redemption price was five shekels. (A deeper explanation of the redemption pricing is found in Num 18:15–17.)

Naturally, children seeing this practice being displayed before them would ask their parents the meaning of the consecration/redemption of the firstborn. Therefore, God expected the parents to teach their children about it and link the practice to the exodus, which was triggered by the death of the Egyptian firstborn and the sparing of the Israelite firstborn. In effect the child was to be told, "Our identity is that of God's chosen people who were rescued from slavery in Egypt and rescued from the death of the firstborn by faith in God. We keep showing that faith by dedicating all firstborn children and all firstborn male livestock to God. But we buy back the children, and the livestock that are inappropriate for God's offerings because God is generous enough to allow us to do that. He still gets an offering, but it is a substitute offering for what he wants us to keep. When we do all this,

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we are doing something that reminds us of God's powerful deliverance from Egypt."

This was the big deal of the Passover, to remember what God had done for his people, and they were to remember this down through the generations. The Passover would become a grand celebration, as Jews from all over the land would make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to present their offerings at the temple as they remembered how the Lord mightily delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians. One of the reasons the Jewish culture has maintained such a strong identity, even to this day, and despite all the persecution, are traditions like these that give them all a common ground and a remembrance of their roots. That is until Jesus came. Jesus changed everything.

When Jesus came, he became for us the Passover Lamb. John the Baptist said, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29) Then in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 13, we see Jesus as he meets with his disciples and explains how he becomes our substitute sacrifice to redeem us from death. And through celebrating the Lord's Supper (communion) we remember what God has done for us through his son Jesus. So, we can think about what God has done for us personally. He called us out of a life of sin, and redeemed us, and builds us up, and gives us a life of hope. It is good to remember these things. When we remember them, it anchors us, and makes us stable even during the storms of life. We tend to forget them over time, those memories can fade, so it is good to go back and remember them, refresh our memories of what God has done for us. When we do, it gives us peace. Those who forget history are the ones who are doomed to repeat it. Without remembering God, we will fall back into our lives of sin. Like when we unplug electronics, they go back to the default mode, remember VHS machines would flash 12:00 after a power outage, except that our default mode is sinful. [I'd like to include my personal testimony here. Long story short, as a student at IIT, I ended up failing and being kicked out twice. But God redeemed me through Jesus' precious blood. I even could become a professor here.]

For us, our redemption is what we have to teach. Now we have a true first-born lamb that redeems all of us. This helps us to remember what God has done for us. Connecting to our theme of getting to know God, well remembering what God has done, helps us to learn more about him.

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