

When the Horrific Becomes Precious

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Exodus

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Bible Text: Exodus 12:1-13, Exodus 12:26-32
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If you have a Bible, if you'll take it and if you'll turn to the Old Testament book of Exodus 12. I'm gonna read verses 1 through 14 and then we'll skip down and read a few other verses so I hope you'll have a Bible open, I hope you'll follow with me. Exodus 12, beginning at verse 1,

1 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 2 "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. 3 Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. 4 And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, 6 and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. 7 Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8 They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. 10 And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11 In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. 13 The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. 14 This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.

Now if you'll look down at verses 26 and 27,

26 And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' 27 you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

Now look at verse 29,

29 At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. 30 And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. 31 Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. 32 Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!"

This is God's word and we pray.

Father, I'm aware that to read these words in public today can be scandalous; some would say we must never read anything like this, certainly in the presence of children, certainly those who have deep sensitivities but, Lord, we must read this, we must read it, we must proclaim it, we must hear it, because what seems so horrific here is actually very precious. Holy Spirit, help us to see that today. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Now some of you love football. I like football. My wife and I watch football. What is football's most distinguishing sound? What do you think that would be? What is football's most distinguishing sound? It's, "Hut! Hut!" The quarterback will say a conglomeration of a number of different things but it usually ends up, "Hut! Hut!" Now why is that? I mean, why not another word? Why not, "Sausage!" you know? Why, "Hut!" you know? And here's the thing: nobody knows why. No, nobody knows why. In fact, I was reading about this this week, former quarterback, he said this, he said, "I've shouted 'Hut!' more than 10,000 times during games and practices. I've been 'hutting' my way through football for 55 years but I have no clue as to why." They don't know, but it's a distinguishing part of the game. There's hardly ever a game you can imagine without the word "Hut!" being used.

I think about this, I think, you know, there are some who go through life never knowing, never understanding the rationale or the real story behind certain teachings and practices within the church. There are some people who come to church or they've been to church before maybe a few times and they see some things and they wonder, "Why are they doing that?" I remember a few years ago, you know, we were praying for some folks at

the front and had the bottle of oil out and anointed them on the head and later that week I got a phone call, "What were you all doing? What were you all doing?" as if it was some weird thing and I guess it was to them, you know, it was a little weird to them.

So there's things that happen in church, practices that take place that sometimes we really don't understand the real story, you know, what's happening here, and I think about that especially today because at the end of the service we are going to partake of the Lord's supper together. Many of you understand, I'm sure, many of you understand all the details about it and you appreciate it, you value it, but by the time we get to this place in the service, I hope that all of us can have, by God's grace, a better understanding, a greater appreciation and value for the symbols that we will be taking.

Now we are at the place in the book of Exodus where, man, the engines are roaring. I mean, it's getting ready to happen. God is committed to delivering his people, getting them out of Egypt, bring them to himself that they might serve him and bring them into a new land. But you remember, Pharaoh has refused to let the people go and in chapter 11, you know, we've seen nine plagues, nine blows against Pharaoh and Egypt. God is doing his signs and wonders to show them that he is the Lord, not the false Egyptians' gods but he and he alone is the Lord, and nine of the plagues and strikes have already come but in chapter 11, we looked at this last week, we saw the last and the final blow, that would be the death of the firstborn in Egypt, and in preparation for this visitation of death, God gives special instructions to the Israelites through Moses and Aaron and that's what we're reading about in chapter 12.

Now we're gonna see, let me just name it first, we're gonna see a bloody night, we're gonna see a memorial day, and we're gonna see how the horrific becomes precious. So, first, a bloody night. Death and destruction are creeping upon Egypt. Every household is going to experience death because of sin. Every household in Egypt is going to experience death because of sins.

The Egyptians, you remember, are gonna experience the death of their firstborn. Remember, the firstborn male child or it might also be among the animals, it's gonna be from the top from the Pharaoh all the way down to prisoners in the dungeon, all, every household is gonna be tasting death. It's horrible but what about the Israelites? You see, all of the previous plagues have left the Israelites unscathed. Remember? God protected them. Nothing gonna happen to them, it's gonna happen to the Egyptians. So it must be absolutely shocking for them to hear that their firstborn is also under the sentence of death. Hm, how did that happen? I mean, we're okay with the Egyptians, we're okay with God pronouncing their firstborn to die, but now we're finding out that the Israelites' firstborn are under the sentence of death.

You go, "Wait a minute! Hold it here! I thought the Israelites were the good people? I thought the Israelites were the people who wore the white hat and the Egyptians wore the black hat? What's going on here?" Well, if you're following with me, that doesn't seem to work, does it? So all of a sudden now we were thinking good people/bad people, and that's what a lot of people think in the world, they think there's the good people who go to

church, the good people, then the bad people who don't, and they think it's good and bad, but what we're finding here is all of a sudden all of the firstborn are under the sentence of death and so what's going on here? What's going on here? What is God showing them, or better, what is he showing us?

Well, I think we can understand it this way. When Adam and Eve committed their horrible rebellion, remember what that was? God said, "You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When you do, you will surely die." And they did. They committed horrible rebellion and disobedience against God and what did God do? God responded with the horror of death. The Bible teaches that we are all sinners by nature. That is apart from any sin that we've committed whether it's been a lot of sins or a small amount of sins, we're all in the same predicament, we are all by nature sinners.

Now, you know, I need to stop here and just simply say I know, I know that a lot of people do not believe that. I know many people in our culture kick against that idea, this idea that we're all sinners, they cannot come to grips with that, but here's what the Bible says in Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Both Jews and Greeks are under sin. In other words, it's not just a certain class of people, it's not just a certain ethnic group, everyone, we are all tainted, we are all by nature sinners and the wages of sin is death. This means – now listen – this means that the Israelites will not be saved by merely being Israelites, right? In other words, God doesn't look down and go, "Oh, well, you're Israelites. You're fine." No. They're not gonna be saved just because they're Israelites any more than any of us are going to be saved because we're good. How will they be saved? How will we be saved? They must trust God's provision.

That's what we've been reading about in chapter 12. What is God's provision? Well, it goes like this: each Israelite must take a lamb, a lamb, a lamb without blemish and here's what they had to do, they had to pull its neck back and slit its throat and drain the blood. Now let's just state the obvious: that's a little uncomfortable for some of us.

I remember I used to deliver tomatoes when I was probably about I guess 9-10 years old, I delivered tomatoes for a local neighbor and go sell them, you know, sell them for 25 cents a basket. I'd go through the subdivision and I, for the life of me, I can never remember a lamb chasing me out of the yard, it was always a dog. A dog, the dog, you know, snapping at my heels and me having to run, get outside the gates so the dog didn't bite me. It was never a lamb and I'm like, "Why in the world, why in the world a precious, little, soft lamb, a little goat? Why?"

They were to slit the throat of this lamb and take some of the blood and smear it on the side of the doorpost and up above the doorpost. You see a picture of it, it would look like this, okay? Pretty gross, right? Pretty horrific. I mean, you've got a dad standing outside and the children are inside and, believe me, I've heard a goat get killed before and it's not pleasant. I mean, they scream and cry like a baby. And so imagine these children are inside and they hear the dad slitting the throat of the lamb and then taking the blood and taking some of it and putting it on the side of the door and up above and let's just face it, I mean, this offends modern sensibilities, doesn't it? It really does. I mean, if I was to, if I

wasn't speaking to you, if I was speaking to a group of people that were unchurched, they would hear this and they would think, "What is wrong with you? Why would you read this, much less believe this? Why would you want anything to do with a God that would instruct such a thing?"

The French philosopher Voltaire, along with former President John Adams, were famous for their criticisms of Christianity. They called it "a bloody religion." They would read things like we are looking at today and they would say, "I don't want anything to do with that bloody religion because there's so much mention of blood."

I was kind of tracking some things down the other day and I noticed a post by a man who was, you know, they were debating this issue and you'll see it on the overhead, here's what he said, "Killing animals to make humans feel better is pathetic. Killing anything does not fix any sin. If God is so loving and merciful, he should just forgive. Why all the suffering?" And I've heard people make that statement before, you know, again bloody religion, how can it, why do we need all this bloodshed? I mean, that's not gonna attract anybody to Christianity with all this bloodshed, singing, "Power in the blood," singing songs like that. We need to find a way to make it more attractive for people.

You might remember the movie "The Prince of Egypt" by Dreamworks. In the script, the early script, the early script, they had God saying, you know, "The Prince of Egypt" is the story about Moses and the exodus and all that, and it had God saying this, "When I see the mark upon the door frame." You see, they were trying to tone it down. No, don't say blood, when I see the mark on the door frame, and there was some, you know, religious leaders who were involved in the script writing and they said, "No way. It's got to be blood." And so it ended up being blood as it should be, but you see, they were trying to back off from this and they said, "This is gonna offend people. Kids are gonna be watching this."

Michael Gungor, some of you may have heard of Michael Gungor or maybe you've heard his music. He's a contemporary Christian artist. Last year he got into some hot water and he ought to be in hot water for this, he said these words, "If you can't think of anything to sing to God other than gratitude for taking your shame away through bloodshed, stop singing." In other words, if Michael Gungor, a professing believer, if he'd of been here this morning and he heard what we sang, he'd of said, "Stop! Stop singing that nonsense! There's something better to sing!" He went on to say this, "Describing the cross as a blood sacrifice is a beautiful metaphor but to see it as literal and out of context that God needed to be appeased with blood, it's not beautiful it's horrific." Now that's not from an atheist, friend, that's from a professing Christian who said, "This idea of bloodshed, blood being shed for sins to appease the wrath of God, that's not beautiful, that's not precious, that's horrific."

So you see where we're at and, I mean, I get it, I get it, chapter 12 is filled with the spilling of blood and maybe our sensibilities are offended, maybe there are those in the church who are embarrassed, "Don't sing those songs. I'm bringing my family, don't sing those songs." You see, the problem is we assume that there's something wrong with God

and not us. In other words, "It's my sensibilities that are right. I'm offended by this. This is horrible, singing about blood and lambs being killed. I'm offended by that." And we assume we're right and God's wrong, but what if God is showing us something here? And you can be sure that he is. He's at least showing us this: he is showing us what our sin deserves, in other words, how can I get these people to understand how horrific their sin is? How can I get them to understand how horrific their rebellion is? How can I help them understand, you see? And so he says, "Here's what we're gonna do, a lamb must be slain, blood must be shed in order to show them what their sin deserves."

You see, blood symbolized two things. One, it symbolized the life of the victim. In other words, when we say that Jesus shed his blood, we can also say Jesus gave his life. It's the same thing and I say that, I need to say that because I actually had a family leave this church, they left this church because they said I didn't talk about the blood enough. When you speak about the blood, you're talking about the life of the person. You see, blood symbolizes, one, the life of the victim and the life of those for whom it was substituted. Leviticus 17 puts it well, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood," okay, that's the life of the victim, "and I have given it," this is God saying, "I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls,." So the blood is symbolized here by for those whom it was substituted.

You see, in chapter 12 what you need to see so clearly is this: God is providing and accepting a substitute in the place so that his judgment is turned away and does not fall upon them. You see, their firstborn would not have to die because a lamb died in their place and as God said, "I will pass through Egypt," as he passed through Egypt in judgment, he would pass over every blood-marked house. Think about it, God is passing through Egypt and he's passing over Egypt in judgment and he comes upon a door with blood on the sides and the lintel and what would he say? In effect he would say, "Someone has already died in this house. Someone has already died. The penalty has already been executed."

So every household in Egypt experienced death because of sin. The Egyptians experienced the death of their firstborn, the Israelites experienced the death of the substitute and we're attracted to this more than we realize. Oh, some will say, "This is horrific. I'm a little nervous about this kind of stuff." Listen, we're more attracted to this than we realize.

Over the years, Kathryn and I have had the pleasure of watching movies with our grandkids and when they were younger, we would often watch movies that portrayed someone giving their life for another, and one movie I thought of this week that does this pretty well is the Disney movie "Frozen." You'll remember that Elsa is about to be killed by Hans when Anna, her sister, bravely steps between the two of them, then freezes solid protecting Elsa, and Anna had the choice of seeing her own happiness or sacrificing herself for the happiness of her sister. That was, again, someone laying down their life for another and isn't it interesting, I've always found this amazing, Hollywood cannot find a better example than the one that's already given in the Bible. Hollywood can't come up

with anything better than that because there's nothing better. Jesus said, "No greater love, no greater love, no better example than for one to lay down his life for another."

So we're attracted to this, we really are. Some of the best movies that we'll ever see will be because someone was laying down their life as a substitute for another. So bloody night. The second thing I want you to focus on is a memorial day. In verse 14 God said, "This day shall be for you a memorial day." Then later in this chapter it says there's gonna come a time when your kids, they're gonna say, "What's this dinner all about? What's this service all about? Why are we doing this stuff? Why is there a lamb being killed? Why are we doing it this way? Why?" You see, the Passover festival that God instituted was something that would last for seven days and it included this meal in order to serve as an aid for the memory, "This is for you a memorial day." In other words, God is basically saying, "What is going to happen, what this signifies is so grand, it's so big, it's so glorious, I don't want you to forget it."

So what's so great about it? God is rescuing his people from judgment. A substitute has been given in their place and they're rescued and they're going to be free and their whole life now belongs to him in consecration to his service and this consecration leads to a celebration. What that's gonna sound like on the radio but anyway, we'll worry about that later. You would think, right, you would think that all of this goodness that God is showing would lead to a celebration, right? Something good happens, you know, and you celebrate and that's what God is calling for here. It's an opportunity to celebrate the goodness of his grace but that's not all, because God cares so much about the next generation, this celebration is to be commemorated in order to teach the next generation about God's salvation. God loves your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren so much that he wants for us to have in the church aids for memory so that your child will say, "Dad, that little wafer, that little cup, what were you doing today? What's that all about?" And it gives you a chance to explain to your children the Gospel, the goodness of God in Christ, and so God cares so much about the next generation, he has these things set in place so that we'll never forget his goodness in salvation.

So there's a bloody night and a memorial day, but then I want us to focus the last few minutes on this, and that is how the horrific becomes precious. You might say, "I'm not Jewish. I don't commemorate the Passover. What does any of this have to do with me?" Fair question. What does any of this have to do with us? Well, I think, I think you would agree on this, it's at least interesting the following things I'm gonna share with you. You have to go, "Okay, that is interesting." For example, John the Baptist in the New Testament in the Gospel of John saw Jesus coming. John had some disciples standing with him and he looked at Jesus and he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world." Empty statement or was it saying something? Oh, it was saying something, "Behold the Lamb of God." Or to say it this way, "Behold the Lamb that God has provided who takes away the sins of the world." We sang it this morning, one of the songs we sang, we said, "Jesus, you are the Lamb of God." That's where that came from.

Well, that's kind of interesting in light of what we're looking at. That's kind of interesting, but then you might say this is interesting as well, you see, Jesus' last meal with his

disciples took place during the feast of the Passover. At that meal, Jesus would show his disciples why he came and he would show them in terms that they would eventually recognize. You see, they knew, they knew their history and they celebrated Passover every year. They knew what we're looking at today, they knew it like the back of their hand, and so they celebrated Passover every year but this time would be different. On Thursday night before the crucifixion, Jesus would hold up the bread and then the cup and he would say these words, "This, this is my body. This is my blood." What is Jesus saying in light of Passover week? What is Jesus saying? He's saying, "I have come to deliver you. I am your substitute. I am the Lamb that God has provided."

And this is just crazy interesting to me. Josephus is a Jewish historian writing about these times and he said during Passover week, the Passover lambs were being killed on Friday at 3 PM which is precisely the time that Jesus was hanging on the cross and died, and then I think we'd have to say this is interesting as well, that the Apostle Paul would say in 1 Corinthians 5, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." You say, "That's interesting. That's interesting." It sounds like to me that everything that we're reading in chapter 12 is pointing to something. It appears to me that everything that we read, all of the bloodshed, all of the animals, all the sacrifice, all are pointing to the Lamb of God and we'd better be thankful it is because the judgment on Egypt was a preview of the judgment to come upon all humanity. "The wages of sin is death." The judgment that we're seeing in the book of Exodus is just a miniature preview of the horrible judgment that is coming upon all of humanity and what we need to see, God saved Israel in Egypt through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, God now saves and delivers through the substitutionary death of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Only he can rescue us from this terrible judgment that is coming and if he has rescued you, if he is your substitute, then we celebrate and we remember.

Here's what the Bible has to say about the Lord's supper. You'll see it on the overhead, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 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.'" Now wait a minute, Passover meal, "Do this so you don't forget. Do this so you do not forget my goodness, that you not forget my saving power. Do this so you don't forget what I've done. You belong to me." And we see the same thing in the Lord's supper.

Then he goes on to say, "In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Wait a minute, isn't that the same thing we're seeing in the Passover meal? You do this and the next generation, your kids are gonna ask, people are gonna say, "What are you doing? What's that all about?" And as we do this, as we take these symbols, we are proclaiming his death until he comes again.

Let me bring this to a close. Some will hear this and they'll say, "Okay, I do admit that's kind of interesting, it's kind of interesting that as the Passover lambs, multiple hundreds of Passover lambs were being sacrificed, at the same time the Lamb of God was hanging

on a cross giving his life away. It's interesting that he would be called the Passover lamb. It's interesting. It's interesting." And you see, for some it's interesting and it's only interesting. For some they will live their lives going, "That's interesting. I know. I know." I remember John Stott once said someone said to him, "Jesus died for your sins," and his response was, "I know that," almost like, "You know, everybody knows that." He was almost like offended because someone would say... People today, it's like, "I know that. I've heard that. I know that." But have you received that? That's what John Stott ended up saying had I received Christ, I had heard about this and I knew all these things but have I really received him? You see, for some it's merely interesting and that's all. For others, it's horrific and that's all. Some will do all they can to avoid this idea of blood and sacrifice and substitute, it's nothing but horrific, but for others that which was horrific has become precious.

Peter said in 1 Peter 1, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." As you come to him, 1 Peter 2, as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious. You're in the hospital, your dearly beloved child has a threatening illness and they don't know what to do. There's been no remedy. You feel all hope's gone. Suddenly a team of doctors burst through the door and they say, "We do, we do have a remedy. We found a pill, but now, I don't think you'll be able to afford this. I mean, it's probably gonna cost everything you have. It's gonna wipe you out financially but we do have a remedy," what would you say? How would you feel? Wouldn't you probably say, "I don't care, I don't care what all this costs." And then when they give it to you, how would you feel about it? Would you just say, "That's interesting. It's sure interesting." No. I think you would say, "This is so precious. This is so precious."

Jesus is far more than merely interesting, the shedding of his blood for some is horrific but for those of us who know him as our substitute, for those of us who have received him, he's precious. How about you? What is he for you? May you see him and count him as precious today.