

“Three Lambs” – Ex. 12:1-42

WCP

Intro

We read in Luke’s Gospel that just before the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples that He had “eagerly desired” to eat that Passover supper with them before He went to the cross. And as we’ve been slowly working our way through this series in the book of Exodus week after week, I gotta say, I too have been eagerly desiring to get to this part of the story; where we see the very first Passover taking place.

We’ve called this series “The gospel according to Moses.” And it’s here – at the very pinnacle of the story – that we see now God’s plan of salvation finally breaking forth in all of its power and its beauty that we’ve been building up to over the past nine weeks. B/c, of course, the story of Exodus is story of deliverance from slavery on an epic scale; it is! But what we must never forget is that what the story of the Exodus is foreshadowing; what it’s all pointing ahead to, is a story of deliverance on an incalculable scale, that touches not just a single people group, but *all* people for *all* time.

What the Passover meant for the people of Israel in history was freedom at last from their slavery in Egypt. But, the *implications* of what this event points to for us, continue to this day and – as we’ll see – will continue to reverberate loudly for all time and eternity. Just as when you use a home pregnancy test: peeing on a stick and having it show a “+” or a “-“ means that the laws of chemistry are still working, but the implications of that chemical change are far deeper and life changing than the event itself.

And - as today is Easter Sunday and we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead - we’re going to see that there is even more to the story about the death of a lamb that brings freedom, than maybe you’d ever even considered before. For example, one of the things I want to show you as we look at the very first Passover in Exodus 12, is not just one lamb, but three! That’s already different, right? And a prevailing theme I see flowing all through the whole story of the Passover – and which I want us to consider this Easter Sunday - is **faith demonstrated in obedience**. *Jesus*, of course, has perfect faith in God the Father which is why He obeys Him perfectly. *Our* faith that God knows what He’s doing not quite so much, right?

Think about it: it would have been incredibly easy for the people of Israel, to hear Moses and Aaron tell them all these very detailed/specific instructions God gives about the preparations for this Passover sacrifice: finding a perfect lamb and preparing it properly; marking of their doorposts with its blood; removing all the yeast from their homes, etc. as *suggestions*; as “best practices” for some, and not as commands to be obeyed by all. And one of the things we often don’t consider is that freedom from this last plague of death for God’s people, required faith in God’s ability to deliver them, *demonstrated* in their obedience to His commands; that if any of God’s people had failed to be obedient to what God had commanded through Moses, they too would have suffered the devastation of this last plague.

And one of the reasons this is so important for us to see today is b/c God is also going to call you and I to be obedient to Him in all kinds of ways; sometimes

really difficult ways, too. And our faith in God/trust that He knows what He's doing, is going to be demonstrated in our willingness to *continue* to obey Him, even when what He's called us to hurts/doesn't make sense/costs us a great deal. Like when He calls some of us:

- to trust Him with either raising a special needs child *or* with not being able to have children at all
- to trust that He knows what He's doing in giving us a job that feels way beyond our abilities *or* in giving us no work at all

One simple way He asks every single one of us to trust Him is in what feels, many times, like the ridiculous simplicity of our salvation: telling us that faith in Jesus alone is all that is needed to be freed from our slavery to sin and death; that there is *nothing* we can do to add to the completed work of Jesus on the cross.

In every single one of those cases, and a thousand other like them, we will either demonstrate our faith in God by continuing to be obedient, or, we will demonstrate our lack of faith/trust in Him by justifying our disobedience.

And in order to understand what faith demonstrated in obedience looks like, I want to look at the Passover and God's deliverance of His people by showing you three different lambs. So we're going to look at **the Passover lamb, God's provision of a Lamb**, and then finally **the risen Lamb. (x2)**

So, if you've closed your bibles, please open them again to Exodus chapter 12 and follow along with me as we come now to the pinnacle of the Exodus story: the Passover.

Alright, so the first lamb we'll be looking at is:

1. The Passover lamb – Ex. 12:1-42

This is where we will spend the majority of our time this morning.

Now, as with last week, our passage is quite long (42 verses) so we won't be able to read through it like we do most Sundays. Instead I'll try to walk us through Exodus 12 and help trace this thread of God's rescue plan for Israel's freedom. But what will actually help set us up really well to do that, will be reading through the chapter just before our passage, ch. 11. So look back one chapter and follow along with me. Exodus 11 we read (**READ Ex. 11**).

So this is setting the stage now for everything that's about to happen. A few things to point out:

1. First of all, look at vs. 4 again. You see how God says here now for the first time, He will go out Himself at perform this last sign. This is unique b/c with each of the other nine plagues, God uses Moses and Aaron to perform them on His behalf. Now, when it comes to the decisive moment of salvation for God's people, God uses no outside agency and acts completely on His own behalf.
2. Second thing to highlight is *the focus* of God's judgment which we see in **vs. 5**: the firstborn son, and, the firstborn son w/o distinction to age or socio-economic status; you see that even the firstborn of the cattle will die. And this is significant b/c of what we said a few weeks ago about the deep significance in this time and culture of the firstborn son. This shows God's precision in that He isn't just killing all Egyptians but a very specific individual within the family unit. And it also shows why this last plague is so devastating b/c God is striking at the treasured child; the one on whom all the future hopes of the family were placed.
3. Finally, look at the end of vs. 8 we see Moses delivers this last threat to Pharaoh and then storms out of his presence "in hot anger." And I think this is always the right response to God's judgment of others. Moses is not gloating at God's superiority and that now the Egyptians are really going to get what's coming to them. Instead Moses is furious and deeply grieved at the hardness of Pharaoh's heart and what his stubborn refusal to obey God will mean for thousands of families tonight.

So now, with all that in place, let's look now at **chapter 12**. Here now, God is going to lay out these very specific instructions for what the people of Israel will need to do in order to be delivered, both from this coming judgment on the firstborn sons, as well as at last from their slavery in Egypt.

You see first of all, if you look at vs. 2 of chapter 12; listen to what God says here (**READ vs. 2**). That means that what God is about to do is so significant in the lives of His people, that, afterwards, they are to alter their entire calendar in reference to this event.

And now we have this series of detailed instructions that follow. We'll touch on them quickly. Look at **vs. 5** first of all. Here God says (**READ vs. 5**). So they are to choose lamb that is one year old and w/o defect, which means they are to choose the best of their flock. So that means, first of all, that obedience for God's people will be

costly. Look at **vs. 7** now. They are to kill the lamb at twilight and then we read **(READ vs. 7)**. This is the way the people of Israel will mark their homes as those who have been obedient so that – as we see in **vs. 13** – when God passes through the land of Egypt to carry out this judgment, when He sees the blood, God will literally “pass over” those homes marked with the sign of faithful obedience. Which is, of course, where the name “Passover” originates.

Vs. 8 now starts to talk about how the people of Israel are to eat the Passover meal. Look there with me. **(READ vs. 8)**. Now, all three of those elements will continue to be a part of the celebration of this Passover meal going forward. The lamb will remind them of the sacrifice that bought their salvation. The bitter herbs will remind God’s people of the bitter struggle they suffered under while in Egypt. And the last element – the bread w/o yeast – will have a particular significance that we learn about it **vs. 11**. Look with me there. God says **(READ vs. 11)**. So the reason for the bread w/o yeast is to signify the way in which the Passover was eaten this first time. It was eaten **with haste**, as people who were expecting to leave at any minute.

God’s people are not to sit around waiting for bread to rise in their easy-bake ovens, they are to eat this meal like a kid whose slept in and trying to shove down some breakfast with his coat and backpack already on as he watches for the bus coming down the road.

And this part about the bread w/o yeast is actually given a much more detailed description later on in **vs. 14-20**. If you look there with me, God says in **vs. 14** that from now on after this night (actually three times a year) God’s people are to remove all yeast from their homes and eat nothing that has been leavened for seven days. This will now become an integral part of the celebration of Passover for God’s people and will be called (unsurprisingly) the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**. And then we see in **vs. 24-28** God says that all these three elements – lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread – will be part of this celebration as a way to instruct the next generations after this, about how God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt.

Now, why give all this time and significance to yeast? Isn’t the sacrifice of the lamb the important part? Well, yes and no. It is the sacrifice of the lamb and the sign of the blood that brings deliverance from death and the ultimate freedom of God’s people, yes. But it is **faith in God demonstrated by the obedience** of God’s people that we see, particularly in the emptying of all yeast from the house and eating the Passover meal in haste. These specific acts of obedience *demonstrate* the faith of Israel that God will actually deliver them.

B/c think about it: you don’t eat a meal of roast lamb standing up with you shoes and jacket on and suitcases packed unless you actually believe you’re going somewhere, right? And the people of Israel clearly do believe now, and so their faith in God to deliver them is demonstrated in their obedience to His commands.

And we see then in **vs. 29** that their faith is not in vain. God does pass through the land of Egypt and the end of **vs. 30** tells us “there was loud wailing in Egypt for there was not a house w/o someone dead.”

And look now at **vs. 31**. Pharaoh isn’t just admitting defeat and turning is back, “get outta here”, he is pleading with Moses and the Israelites to leave. Look at **vs. 33 (READ vs. 33a)**. And, not only is the faith of God’s people rewarded by their

deliverance from Egypt – just as God had promised – **vss. 35-36** show as well that the Egyptians give their gold and jewelry and clothing to God's people so that they functionally plunder the nation as they are leaving.

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Now there are volumes of things we could look at already based on what we've seen here, but – like I said earlier – the simple thing I want you to see for now is the way the faith of God's people needed to be demonstrated by their obedience. Which is just to say: they had to actually *do* the things God had commanded them to do! They couldn't just say, "Yeah! Great plan God that's totally gonna work!" but then not mark their homes with the blood or remove the yeast from their homes. Their faith in God had to be demonstrated by their obedience.

And it is no different for you and I today. These core values we keep talking about – no – are ***not*** God's commands, but they *are* based on specific commands in His word. "Everyone a minister" – **2 Cor. 5** says if we are in Christ we are now God's ambassadors. If you agree that that's right but you don't live that way, aren't you demonstrating your lack of faith in God by being disobedient to His word? **Rom. 8** says God saved us to conform us more and more each day into the image of His Son. If you love that idea, but you're not constantly seeking to grow in your knowledge of God and His word, aren't you demonstrating your lack of faith in Him by being disobedient to His purpose in saving you?

Like the people of Israel in our passage, we need to get that God isn't looking for our affirmation; He's looking for our obedience. The Passover lamb must be a year old and w/o blemish. It's blood must mark the doorposts and it must be eaten in haste as those who are expecting to be delivered. Anything less than this demonstrates a lack of faith in the One commanding them. And our obedience to God's commands/or lack of it, demonstrates the very same thing.

This is the Passover Lamb. Next I want to show you:

2. God's provision of a Lamb – Gen. 22:1-14, Luke 22:14, 19-20

In the book of **Genesis 22**, we read a very striking statement from a man named Abraham that comes in the context of an extremely difficult act of obedience. If you're not familiar with the bible, Abraham is the man God called to be the father of the whole nation of Israel. What was impossible about that was that Abraham was super old when God called him (as was his wife Sarah) and they had no children. But, miraculously, God provided a son for Abraham and Sarah named Isaac and the seeming impossibility of this elderly couple beginning a nation of people, began to seem possible again.

But in the 22nd chapter of Genesis, God tests Abraham in order to solidify in Abraham's heart and mind that God *alone* is the one Abraham is trusting in to carry out this impossible promise, and not in his son Isaac. So God calls Abraham to an unthinkable act of obedience: He asks Abraham to sacrifice his only son as a burnt offering. And Abraham then demonstrates his faith in God by travelling with Isaac to the place God commanded, in order to sacrifice him; to offer this promised child back to God.

And as Abraham and Isaac are walking up the hill, it becomes apparent to Isaac that although they have wood and fire for the offering, they have no lamb to sacrifice. So Isaac asks his dad about this. And in **vs. 8** of Genesis 22 we read this: "Abraham answered, '**God Himself will provide the lamb** for the burnt offering my son.'" And in the course of events, that is exactly what God does, just as Abraham is about to sacrifice his son; God provides a ram caught in the thorns as a substitute sacrifice for his son, and Abraham then calls that place, "The LORD will provide."

But this "Lamb" that God will provide, has been what all of mankind has been seeking for since sin first entered the world in Genesis 3; where God promised that He would provide someone - this "seed" of the woman - who would redeem everything that was now in captivity to sin. This "Lamb" that brought freedom was certainly prefigured in the story of the Passover as well as in the sacrificial system Moses lays down for God's people in the Law. But most supremely, this Lamb that God provided was in the Person of Jesus Christ; that's where all these other lambs were pointing to. And we know that, firstly, b/c, do you remember what John the Baptist calls Jesus in the NT when Jesus first steps on the scene to begin His earthly ministry and be baptized by John. John sees Jesus in the crowd and says, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"

If you'll look with me in Luke's Gospel chapter 22. (746). **Vs. 1** says (**READ vs. 1a**). Then in **vs. 7** we read that Jesus celebrates the feast with His disciples on the day of the feast when the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed, which will also be the day He is sacrificed on a Roman cross.

And we know that Jesus is the true/greater Lamb that God provides b/c - in celebrating the Passover with His disciples - it is here that Jesus radically redefines the meaning and significance of the whole celebration. Look at **vs.19**. Here we read (**READ vs. 19a**). Now, ordinarily during the celebration of this meal, the one presiding over it would recount the story of the Exodus and then say, "This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt." But look at what Jesus says instead. He says, "This bread is My body, given for you." And then, Jesus

says that – from this day forward – this meal is now to be eaten in remembrance of *Him!*

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Do you see what that means? That means that the apostle Paul is right in 1 Cor. 5:7 when he calls Jesus “our Passover Lamb.” Jesus is the Lamb that God provided to free us from the curse of death and from our slavery to sin. Jesus is the Lamb whose blood marks us with the sign, not of *our* faithful obedience, but of ***His***, so that God’s judgment of sin “passes over” us and we are not destroyed. And now, each time we celebrate that “Passover” that was so beautifully redefined by Jesus which we call “The LORD’s Supper”, it is no longer a meal remembering what God did in delivering His people from slavery in Egypt thousands of years ago, but **the ultimate fulfillment of what that act in history had always been pointing to: the sacrifice of the Lamb that God would provide. The sacrifice that would bring freedom for all time and eternity.** Do you see now how the story of the Exodus truly *is* the gospel according to Moses?

And yet, as amazing as that truly is, even *that* is not the whole story of the gospel. Those of you who are type A's and are still counting will remember that I said I wanted to show you three lambs. And the last and, really, the most important, Lamb we'll look at this morning is:

3. The risen Lamb – Rev. 1:17-18, 5:1-14

And we need to see this last Lamb in particular b/c this is where the bible takes the story of God's deliverance of His people, which is already amazing, and just ramps it up to mind blowing, heart bursting level that's it's hard to even fathom. And only the gospel can do that; b/c it's only in the gospel that we see that the Lamb that God provided to give His life for our freedom, ***doesn't stay dead!!!***

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 15 that when Jesus rose from the dead three days after His crucifixion just as He said He would, He appeared to Peter and then to the other disciples, to over 500 others and then to James and final to Paul Himself. The point is, Jesus gave those who He entrusted with His news of victory over death many proofs of the fact that He was no longer in the grave, but risen!

But beyond that, when we turn to the very last book in the bible: Revelation - which is more properly called the Revelation of Jesus Christ - there we begin to see this same Lamb imagery picked up again. First of all in **Revelation 1:17-18** Jesus reveals Himself to John and He says these words (**READ 17a-18**).

And then, after this amazing picture of worship of God the Father in Rev. 4, in chapter 5, we see the focus now turn to Jesus. Turn with me one last time now to Revelation 5 (pg. 869). There, God the Father has a scroll in His hand with seven seals which most commentators agree contains some kind of legal will or covenantal promise of God. But when an angel seeks to find someone who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals, no one can be found and John begins to weep.

But then in **vs. 5** one of the elders comes to John and says this; look with me there. He says (**READ vs. 5**). So there is One who is worthy to open the scroll and it is Jesus, described now as a conquering Lion who has triumphed; the "triumph" implicitly refers to His resurrection and victory over sin and death as we saw in chapter 1 of Revelation. But when John turns, and looks to see this conquering Lion, what he sees instead, is not a Lion, but a Lamb. Look now at **vs. 6**. John says (**READ vs. 6**).

So now we see this same Lamb that God provided; bearing all the marks and wounds of a Lamb who has been slain, ***but standing!***

I dunno if you can picture this in your mind, but it's like, if there was an Avengers character who was a lamb, this is what He would look like.

This Lamb who was slain is now risen and very much alive; standing in the center of the throne. And although He is alive, He keeps the marks of his death as an eternal reminder of both the price He paid to free, us as well as the reality that death has no power over Him.

Then the entire rest of the chapter is just a series of songs giving eternal praise to God the Father and to the risen Lamb.

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And what I want you to see in particular, is that if you look through these songs praising the risen Lamb, over and over again what they are praising Jesus for is **His obedience**; His perfect obedience to God the Father in giving His very life to free us from our slavery to sin and death. Jesus' faith in God's plan demonstrating itself perfectly in His obedience to leave all the glory and riches of heaven and take on human flesh; all so that He might be our true and better Passover Lamb. The author of Hebrews tell us Jesus was able to obey the Father perfectly in this way b/c of "the joy set before Him" which I believe was the joy described here in Revelation 5 of purchasing men and women from every tribe and language and people and nation back to God; of securing their freedom for all time by His obedience unto death.

Conclusion

Jesus is the risen Lamb. The whole message of Easter as well as the gospel we cling to centers around that message; that we don't serve the memory of a Passover Lamb sent by God to rescue us, but a risen Lamb; alive today and worshipped for all eternity in heaven. In fact, the apostle Paul goes so far as to say in 1 Cor. 15 – after describing Jesus' death and burial – that if Jesus is not raised; if He's just the Passover Lamb or the Lamb that God provides as a sacrifice for our sins, then we are without any hope at all and we are still in our sins. Which means that everything else Jesus did – even His death on the cross – means *nothing* unless Jesus rises again; and that's b/c Jesus' resurrection is the confirmation that God has accepted Jesus' death as payment for our freedom. Everything else Jesus did makes Him our Example; the resurrection makes Him our Saviour!

Jesus – of course - is all three Lambs. He is our true and better **Passover Lamb** who's blood shed frees us from the tyranny of sin that once help us captive. He is **the Lamb God provided**, or as Paul says in Rom. 3, the atoning sacrifice God put forward for our salvation. But above all He is **the risen Lamb** who is alive today and praised for all time in heaven.

Jesus has accomplished everything necessary for our salvation and His resurrection is proof of that. Will you come to Him today in faith, trusting in God's risen Lamb to save you? And if you do know Jesus as your Saviour today, praise Him for His faithful obedience in securing your freedom for all time and eternity.

He is the risen Lamb! And that is what makes all the difference.

Let's pray.