

**You Shall Know I AM:
The Passover (The First Supper) (Exodus 11:1-13:16)**
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on October 14, 2018

Introduction

- ❖ When I conduct premarital counseling, one of the questions I like to ask during the session on parents and in-laws is for the couple to describe the first time they visited their future in-law's home and shared a **family meal**. That meal can tell you so much about that family.
 - We talk about what's served for dinner because the food itself is a huge transmitter of customs and culture. But I also get them to think about how the conversation is carried. What do you talk about? Who does most of the talking? Are there any traditions like waiting for everyone to sit down and starting with a prayer (maybe even holding hands as you pray)? Are there any policies like no phones at the table or other distractions like a television playing? **And how frequent are these kind of meals where everyone in the family is sitting down sharing it together?**

- ❖ **And in addition to family meals, I try to hone in on any ritual meals that are valued by the family.** I'm talking about meals that carry lots of meaning and tradition and are repeated and preserved by the family. Meals to celebrate a birthday or meals associated with a cherished holiday like Thanksgiving, Christmas, or New Years. These ritual meals are an important means of keeping family members connected by a shared tradition and making sure that tradition is passed down from generation to generation.
 - **Ritual meals are special. They have this way of connecting you to people – people you don't even know from generations past.** By partaking in a ritual meal you're suddenly connected with others through a shared tradition, a shared story. This is why sitting down for a traditional Thanksgiving meal in 2018 is going to bring you closer to a family celebrating Thanksgiving in 1918 – closer than a family meal from last Tuesday. Ritual meals are special in that way. **They have an ability to draw you into a tradition – into a story – that's bigger than you and your family.**

- ❖ This morning's text is all about one of those ritual meals. We've been working our way through Exodus, and this morning we're going to cover another larger section – chapters 11, 12, and 13 up to v16. **All of it centers on the tenth and final plague and the ritual meal known as the Passover, as well as the accompanying Feast of Unleavened Bread.**
 - In the last couple weeks, we've seen how these Ten Plagues have functioned – not just as punishments against Egypt – but as proofs (signs) that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is truly the God of all creation. And by arranging for the Exodus of his people from slavery to play out exactly the way it did – with multiple signs and wonders and great acts of judgment (7:3-4) – **the LORD was making a name for himself among his people and all the nations of the earth.**
 - You shall know that I am the LORD (Yahweh). That's been a common refrain throughout the book (6:7; 7:5; 7:17; 8:22; 14:4, 18; 16:12; 29:46). **In saving his people and judging his enemies, God is exalting his Name.** He's glorifying himself.

- ❖ So now in chapter 11, we arrive at a somber moment. **Here God warns of his final plague directed against Egypt and prepares his people for how they can survive it.** And he also explains how they can pass on, through a ritual meal, this story of how he rescued his people.
 - I've divided this message into three parts. 1) We'll consider the background of the Passover, 2) the significance of the Passover, and 3) the remembrance of the Passover.

The Background of the Passover

- ❖ We begin with the background of this meal. If we could sum it up, **the background to the Passover is *the approach of death*.** In chapter 11, God sends a final warning to Pharaoh that an encroaching death will be literally at your doorsteps by midnight that night (v4). If you look at chapter 11, the confrontation that Moses has with Pharaoh is interrupted by vv1-3, which explains that the LORD will give the Israelites and Moses great favor in the eyes of their Egyptian neighbors to the point that they'll give away their silver and gold jewelry.
 - So the speech that Moses began in chapter 10:29 picks right up in chapter 11:4, *"⁴So Moses said, 'Thus says the LORD: 'About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, ⁵and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle.'"*
- ❖ Take note of a few observations. **First, notice how in this final plague God is *not* utilizing secondary causes like a staff or a strong east wind.** This time he's going to do it himself. In chapter 12:12, he says, *"I will pass through the land of Egypt . . . I will strike all the firstborn."* Chapter 12:29 records, *"At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt."* So unlike the previous plagues which could be interpreted by some as natural disasters, there's no question that God is doing this. He is the one targeting the firstborn.
- ❖ Here's a second observation. **Notice how God is *not* discriminating between persons.** The approaching death will touch every family in Egypt regardless if you're highborn or lowborn, if you're the son of Pharaoh or a the son of a slave girl. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor. It doesn't even matter if you're a man or beast. Chapter 11:5 says the LORD will even strike all the firstborn of the cattle.
 - **What this demonstrates is how the corruption of sin, that was unleashed on God's good earth, has pervaded the entirety of creation.** There is not a single aspect of creation unaffected by the Fall. So the Great I AM, the Final Judge and Arbiter of all things has every right to exact judgment on all mankind and all the beasts of the field. No one is exempt. We all fall short of the glory of God.
- ❖ **But at the same time, though God doesn't discriminate between persons, he does make a distinction between Egypt and Israel.** I know that might sound like a contradiction, so let me try to explain. But first look at v6, *"⁶There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again. ⁷But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel."*

- **The implication is that not a single firstborn among Israel will die that night.** It'll be a silent night in the Israelite neighborhood, while a great cry of agony will ring through the streets of Egypt. That's the distinction the LORD is making.

- ❖ But when the text says the LORD plans to pass through the land of Egypt, that means passing through Egyptian *and* Israelite villages. That's an aspect of the story we shouldn't overlook. **We tend to see this plague as God's way of punishing Egypt on Israel's behalf.** We only picture him visiting each Egyptian home with wrath and punishment.
 - But look in chapter 12:23. We're getting ahead of ourselves, but it's an important point to make. *"For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you."* We'll talk about the blood and the lamb more in our next point. **But what I want to note is how that "destroyer" – which is probably an angel of the LORD – will visit every Jewish home as well and will strike their firstborn if the LORD does not prevent it.** If the LORD does not let judgment pass over that home.

- ❖ That's why I'm saying the LORD didn't discriminate between Egyptian and Jew. **He visited every Jewish home that night. He didn't overlook their sin.** He treated their sin just as deserving of judgment.
 - **So God didn't give the Israelites a way to avoid judgment, but he did offer a way to survive it.** He made a way for their wickedness to be judged and yet somehow spare their firstborns. **And it had nothing to do with the piety or goodness of the people inside those homes. It had everything to do with the shed blood of a lamb on the outside of those homes.** If an Israelite family had faith and trusted in God's means of salvation – their entire household would survive the night. That was the distinction being made – without any compromise to God's justice.

- ❖ **But many people will still have a hard time understanding why God would be targeting the firstborn of every family.** As a second child, it's never really bothered me, but I can understand why it seems rather arbitrary. If everyone is a guilty sinner, then why not strike down everyone in the household? **Why only firstborn sons?** (It's clarified later in chapter 13:13 that we're talking specifically about firstborn sons.)
 - **On one hand, this is a just retribution for Pharaoh's attack on Israel's sons back in chapter 1.** Remember, he set up a wicked policy to cull the Jewish population by throwing their sons in the Nile. They're reaping what they sowed.

- ❖ But the emphasis on firstborn sons has to be understood in the cultural context of those days. **In biblical times, the firstborn son received the vast majority of the family's wealth and took charge of the entire household.** These were agrarian cultures that typically had large families, and so if all the children received an equal share of the inheritance, then the family's status, as a whole, would go down. **So practically everything was given to the firstborn son, and he was the one responsible for preserving the family's name and wealth.**

- ❖ If that bothers you, I want to be clear that the Bible is not prescribing this practice – just describing a cultural practice. **In that culture, the firstborn son was the head of the family. Their name, their property, their wealth, their hope and future – all rested on him.**
- ❖ So when God lays claim on their firstborn sons, he’s essentially saying, **“I lay claim on you and your entire household, on your hope and your future, on your all in all.”** Scripture teaches that, because of our sin, we have forfeited our all in all. All of us are indebted to God.
 - **So to lay claim on firstborn sons is a way of saying he lays claim on all of us – on our very lives, on our very future.** This makes sense of what we read later on in chapter 13. Look at vv12-13. Here God reiterates his claim on the firstborn of every womb. *“¹²you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD’s. ¹³Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.”*
- ❖ So all the firstborn are to be set apart to the LORD – as in to be sacrificed to him. But he makes a way to redeem a firstborn donkey or firstborn son. **That’s what redemption means in a biblical sense – it’s to rescue someone from a deserved death.**
 - This became an ongoing practice for generations to come. Look at v14, *“¹⁴And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ – Daddy, why are you slaying that lamb? – you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ¹⁵For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.”*
- ❖ So let me sum it up. The background to the Passover is an approaching death – a death we all deserve but represented by the death of the firstborn. **In laying claim on firstborn sons, God is laying claim on our lives. And he has every right and all the might to collect on our debt.** Friends, this is sobering news, bad news. But the good news is that there’s a way of redemption. We can be redeemed just like that donkey, just like that firstborn son of Israel.

The Significance of the Passover

- ❖ This leads to our second point and the significance of the Passover. And if I were to put it in a phrase it would be *the need for a bloody substitute*. That’s what the Passover meal signifies. That’s the underlying message. All ritual meals have one.
 - A **Thanksgiving** meal traditionally includes a cornucopia. which signifies our gratitude for bounty in harvest and life in general. For those who celebrate **Lunar New Year**, that ritual meal involves serving noodles, which signify long life, and eating fish, which in Chinese sounds like the word for abundance. **Passover** involves serving a roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread – they all carry deep significance.

- ❖ If we look at chapter 12:1-13, we're given instructions for how to prepare the Passover meal. **First, each family is to begin preparation on the 10th day of the month of Abib** (13:4; according to our calendar that's late March to early April). And we're told that this month will from now on be the start of a new year for Israel. God is beginning something new here. In many ways it's a new creation.
- ❖ **Next, you select the right lamb.** It has to be a one year old male, and it has to be without blemish. God deserves our best. **And then you have to identify with that lamb.** Every family chooses their own lamb. If a family is too small to finish an entire lamb it can join with a neighbor, but **the general idea is that this lamb becomes part of the family.**
 - Notice how you keep it with you for four days. Why not just pick a lamb on the 14th day? Why do it on the 10th day? **Partly because you start to identify with the lamb over the course those few days.** The kids in the home probably gave it a name and played with it. It's now *your* lamb.
- ❖ Which makes it that much harder but that much more significant when you slay it and roast it at twilight. That's a part of *you* being killed. You're then to take some of the blood and put it on the doorposts of your home (we'll come back to that). And you and your family eat the entire roasted lamb with **bitter herbs** (which recalls their bitter servitude) and **unleavened bread** (which doesn't take long to prep and symbolizes the haste of this escape). This haste is also demonstrated by the way they dress with belt fastened, sandals on, and staff in hand.
 - And then in vv14-20, it goes on to give instructions for how to celebrate the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**. Essentially for the following seven days, they're to cleanse their homes on any leaven and use only unleavened bread. In Scripture, leaven was a common symbol of impurity. Just like leaven, a little impurity mixed into the covenant community will continue to spread and until it affects the entire community.
- ❖ So these two events – the Passover meal and the Feast of Unleavened Bread – are distinct but often spoken of together because one flows right into the other. **The emphasis in both of these events is on remembering.** Let me read chapter 12:14, *“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.”*
 - **So the whole idea is that the Jews were to partake in this ritual meal as a way to remind themselves of their need for that lamb – for that bloody substitute.** This idea of a bloody substitute is so deeply woven into the story of Israel. It's a part of their tradition that stretches back much further than Exodus.
- ❖ **The first time this motif of the bloody substitute shows up is at the end of Genesis 3.** This is after Adam and Eve have been judged and condemned for their disobedience to God. He exiles them out of the Garden, never to return. But as they go, the text says, *“And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”* (Gen. 3:21)

- **That garment of skin – that covered Adam and Eve’s shame – it came from an animal, and I’m sure it didn’t give it up voluntarily.** God had to sacrifice that animal in their place. That means blood was shed. And it means God’s judgment passed over them because a bloody substitute was covering their sin and shame.
- ❖ **The next occurrence would be in Genesis 22 where Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son to the LORD.** He doesn’t fully understand, but Abraham obeys. He brings Issac up the mountain, and he’s about to sink the knife in his son when the LORD stops him, tells him it was a test, and then provides a ram caught in a thicket, which Abraham sacrifices instead of his son. God provided another bloody substitute and his judgment passed over.
 - **And then back in Exodus 4:24-26, the LORD passes over Moses himself and spares him from death, and it also involves a bloody substitute.** This time it was his son's foreskin. His failure to circumcise his son had incurred God's judgment.
 - **So by the time you reach Exodus 12, this pattern has been set.** God's judgment approaches every family in the land of Egypt – Egyptian and Jew alike. They were all sinners deserving of death. But the LORD will spare those who take refuge under the blood of a substitute. **Death will pass right over if it was already visited on the lamb whose blood covered their door.**
- ❖ **Those are the gracious acts of God being replayed and relived in the ritual meal called Passover.** Imagine a family sitting down to eat this meal. When they bite into those bitter herbs, they’re reminded of the bitterness that sin has brought into their lives. And when they break off a piece of unleavened bread, they’re reminded of the urgency of the moment – that they’re sinners deserving of death and that God’s judgment is at hand.
 - But when they serve that sacrificial lamb, everyone at the table is reminded of the blood that's staining their doorway. They're reminded of their salvation. **I picture the firstborn son staring at the dead lamb on the table thinking, “That could’ve been me. That should’ve been me.”** The fact is everyone around that table should’ve died, but they were spared because of a bloody substitute.
- ❖ No matter how many generations passed, no matter how many years went by, this ritual meal connected families across the span of time with the original tribe of Israel that experienced the Exodus. This ritual meal drew families into the larger story of God’s covenantal faithfulness to his people and how he redeemed them by means of a bloody substitute.

The Remembrance of the Passover

- ❖ But now the question is, if this ritual meal is so significant and if God’s people are to keep this feast “*throughout your generations as a statute forever*” (12:14), then why don’t we, as Christians, observe the Passover? Why don’t we eat this meal? **It’s because this meal was never meant to be final. It was meant to point to something else. To another meal.**
 - One that took place a thousand years later in an upper room in the city of Jerusalem, between a rabbi and eleven of his disciples. **The Passover is the First Supper that finds its fulfillment in the Last Supper.**

- ❖ Listen to what it says in **Luke 22:14-15**, “¹⁴*And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”* On the night he was betrayed, Jesus was eating the ritual Passover with his disciples. Bitter herbs were probably served. There was definitely unleavened bread. I’m sure there was a roasted lamb. But the focus was not on this lamb.
- ❖ The focus was on the Lamb of God – on the One who took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said, “*This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*” (v19) **Just like the Passover lamb, Jesus gave himself as a bloody substitute.** He gave his body to be bruised and battered, nailed and pierced, for his disciples – for all who would trust in him.
 - And then Jesus took a cup and said, “*This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood,*” (v20). He’s referring to the wine-red blood of the lamb poured out and painted on each doorway, protecting the occupants in that home. **In the same way, Jesus poured out his blood on the cross.** And it’s his blood that covers us.
- ❖ **Friends, the wrath of God is bearing down on each of us.** Because of our sins, death approaches. There’s a plague of judgment coming to our doorstep. **And the gospel says that our only recourse, our only remedy, our only rescue is to be covered by the blood of the True Passover Lamb.** Judgment rested on him so that it could pass over others.
 - **What you have to do is flee to Christ and hide in him.** Just like on the night of the First Supper – as long as you hid inside a home that had the blood of a substitute over it – as long as you stayed there – you’d be safe (Ex. 12:22). If you ventured outside and banked on the hope that you were devout enough in your faith to stand on your own – you’re a goner.
 - **If you want to live, if you want to be redeemed (to be saved), it’s not about whether you’ve lived a good enough life.** It’s not about whether you deserve to be passed over. You don’t. It’s all about hiding yourself in Christ. **It’s all about being covered by his blood and righteousness.**
- ❖ **The good news that was forecasted in the First Supper is fulfilled in the Last Supper, which is now remembered in the Lord’s Supper.** Church, the reason we regularly partake of a ritual communion meal is because we’re part of a larger family and a larger story.
 - **Whenever we eat the bread and drink the cup, we’re drawn into the gospel story – of God’s redeeming love and salvation by means of substitution.** We’re there with the Israelites huddled in their homes under a blood-stained door. We’re there with the disciples huddled in the upper room eating the Passover. And we’re there with Christ on the cross, identifying with him in his death.
- ❖ This is why we take the Lord’s Supper so seriously in our church. **It’s a ritual meal but not a routine one.** Many of us probably need to repent of an indifferent attitude towards the Supper. We need to stop treating it like a formality and start seeing how this ritual meal connects us with Christ and with his Church throughout the centuries. When we partake of it again next month, let’s eat and drink to the family of God and the story of his salvation.