

Series – Exodus: The God who Guides and Provides

“The Lamb Who Was Slain”

Introduction: As we continue on in the book of Exodus on this Independence Day in our nation, our inclination might be to view the deliverance by God of his people from slavery in Egypt as a kind of paradigm for political and/or economic liberation, concluding that what God really wants is that people be set free, from whatever it is that binding or oppressing them. So, Exodus has been read and used as a motivating document to inspire numerous drives toward freedom or independence of some sort.

In a book that came out a few years ago, *Exodus and Liberation*, author John Coffey notes that the Exodus story was drawn on as fuel for the Puritan Revolution, the Glorious Revolution, the American revolution, and the revolution that led to the abolition of slavery. It was called upon in support by leaders ranging from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr. to George W Bush to Barak Obama.

What can be missed, however, in these highly political readings of Exodus, is that what God holds out for us in the Exodus event is not only a freedom *from* some kind of bondage, but a freedom *for* a different kind of service to a different kind of king. The Exodus, we want to say, does not constitute a declaration of independence as such, but a declaration of dependence upon the God who guides and provides for his people, and who ultimately becomes a lamb, slain for us and for the world. It’s how the deliverance in that original exodus began.

I. The Ten Plagues

A. When we left Moses and Aaron last week, no one was really very happy! The people were discouraged because when Moses had asked Pharaoh to let them go into the wilderness to worship the LORD, Pharaoh not only refused but had also made their work harsher. And Moses wasn’t happy because it appeared as if the Lord wasn’t going to come to rescue his people after all. A lot of “Why?” questions were being asked without any answers being offered. God, it seems, was simply calling his people to trust that he had them in mind and would act, in his way and in his timing.

B. And act he then did! Ten times, in dramatic fashion. In what are known as the Ten Plagues, God sought to move Pharaoh’s heart and change Pharaoh’s mind. Plagues such as the Nile turning to blood, frogs and gnats and flies and locusts filling the land, boils and hail and darkness falling on the people. Passover actually comes within, and as a part of the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn sons. Before looking at that one more closely, a few general comments might be helpful.

1. The plagues reveal the amazing patience and long-suffering of God. Had I been in charge of the world, and my people were being mistreated and oppressed, I’m not sure I would have given ten chances for the oppressors to change their minds. Two, three, possibly, four, but ten? But the LORD kept holding out the opportunity.

2. Each plague was not only intended to make Pharaoh and his people more uncomfortable, and so move them to change their hearts. Each was a demonstration that the LORD was more powerful than any of the gods of Egypt, from the fertility god that was thought to be the river Nile, to the sun goddess Ra, to even pharaoh himself, whose inheritance was passed down through the firstborn son. This was a demonstration as to who the God of heaven and earth really was.

3. Through the plagues, God wasn't making life miserable for the Egyptians just for the fun of it. He was meeting and responding to decades of injustice oppression. This God stood against anything that had harmed, or was harming, his good creation and his purposes.

II. The Tenth Plague

A. Within the tenth plague, then, the plague on the firstborn, come God's instructions for the Passover. Each Israelite family was directed to sacrifice a lamb and spread the blood of this lamb upon the doorframes of their homes. If they did so, God's judgment would "pass over" them. The blood—a sign of life and of their faith—would enable them to be spared. And so, on that fateful evening, at midnight, the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, all those who did not have the blood of the lamb on their doorframes. It was enough, finally, to move Pharaoh to let God's people go. And they were ready, grabbing their dough before the yeast had been added, having their cloaks tucked into their belts, the greatest rescue operation in Jewish history was launched. This event would be looked back at and remembered, not only at its annual celebration, but also at times of great distress. It revealed that the LORD is the God who sees oppression, hears the cries of his people, and comes to their rescue.

B. But the Exodus would also serve as a signpost of things yet to come. If we look carefully, a couple of things about this "yet to come" we want to notice.

1. Divine judgment, when it comes, will fall on everyone because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Israelite as well as Egyptian. Judgment did not pass over the Israelites simply because of where they were born. God holds all of us accountable. The Israelites, if you will, through the blood of the lamb, needed to declare whose side they were on, who they were trusting.

2. God doesn't ever wield his justice without also offering mercy. And his way of mercy is not only multiple opportunities to repent, but it is ultimately the way of substitution, the way of providing a sacrifice to die in our place. For what's important to realize is that forgiveness isn't free; it's costly. The debt we owe for the wrongs we commit doesn't just vanish into thin air. For justice to be done, for God to not simply wink at wrongdoing, our debt must be paid. Remarkably, it is paid, for us, by God himself! The cost is born by Jesus, who becomes the lamb, dying in our place that justice may be served.

We see this unfold as the scriptures unfold, and it becomes pivotal for our lives as Christians as we come to understand and see Jesus revealed as the lamb who was slain for us:

- The prophet Isaiah would point in this direction with the words: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him . . . he was led like a lamb to the slaughter. . ." (Isa. 53:5, 7).
- When Jesus arrived on the scene, and John the Baptist saw him coming towards him, John declared: "Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29).
- On the night on which he was betrayed, Jesus directed his followers to go find a place where they could celebrate the Passover meal. As we often comment when coming to the table each month, Jesus used that meal to speak of the rescue from the slavery to sin he was about to provide by offering himself as the lamb.

- Peter, who was at that meal, reflecting later on the ministry of Jesus, wrote: "For you . . . were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pe. 1:18-19). He highlights the perfect sacrifice that was needed to satisfy the perfect justice of God.

- And finally John, in the vision of Revelation, writes: "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne . . ." (Rev. 5:6). The Lamb, once dead, is now risen and ascended!

C. John Stott comments that this act of substitution is at the heart of the Christian message: "The essence of sin is we human beings substituting ourselves for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for us. We put ourselves where only God deserves to be; God puts himself where we deserve to be" (*The Cross of Christ*, p. 160).

Let me just add that sometimes it is claimed that what Jesus on the cross really amounts to is child abuse, to a Father putting his Son to death. In response, know that Jesus went willingly, and, that if we understand the trinity rightly, that it is God, as Stott puts it, who put himself there.

So let us now put ourselves at the table of the Lord where we recall the Passover feast, and give thanks for the Lamb who was slain that we might be free to love and serve Him who now sits on the throne.