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Eastminster Worship Services

Thursday, December 24, 2009 • Christmas Eve

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You *Passed Over at Christmas*

Exodus 12:1-14

Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh, Senior Pastor

Christmas reminds us that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, lived obediently, suffered and died, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and will return again.

Moses asked God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”¹ God said to Moses, “‘I Am Who I Am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I Am has sent me to you.’”² Moses was told by God to tell Pharaoh to let God’s people go.

The final and tenth plague was the plague on the firstborn. Every firstborn son in Egypt would die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, to the firstborn son of the slave girl and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. God outlined a seven day period for the people to prepare for the plague on the firstborn. For seven days they ate only bread made without yeast; for seven days no yeast was found in their houses; on the seventh day, they slaughtered year-old males without defect from the sheep or the goats; the animals were slaughtered at midnight; then some of the blood was splattered on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses; that same night they ate the meat roasted over a fire along with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast; on that same night, I Am Who I Am passed through Egypt and struck down every firstborn, both men and animals; on that same night, God brought judgment on the gods of Egypt; on that same night, I Am Who I Am passed over the Israelites homes.

Passover is a profound example of God’s glory displayed and the people of God being set free. This last act of God led Pharaoh to demand that the people leave Egypt. The people were commanded to celebrate this ritual every year to commemorate how God brought them out of Egypt. They were to remember what God had done. Because the LORD kept vigil, the people were to do the same; to honor the LORD for the generations to come.

When you were a child, you probably played with models of various kinds: model cars, trains, airplanes

¹Exodus 3:13

and doll houses. The point of a model is that it provides a simplified and scaled-down version of the real thing. The story of the Passover in Exodus 12 is not only a remarkable record of the deliverance of the Israelites, but it also provides a 3-dimensional model of God's way of salvation as achieved by Jesus; the Jesus of Christmas; the Jesus who died on the cross of Calvary. The three dimensions are what we are saved from, by and to.

First, we are saved from destruction. Exodus 12:12 reads, "I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt." The people of God were spared. The Israelites were saved from destruction.

Do not imagine that divine judgment is just an Old Testament reality. In Romans 5:9, we read of being saved from God's wrath through Christ. The difference is that in the Old Testament God's judgment is mainly temporal and in the New Testament it is predominantly eternal. It was Jesus himself who said in Matthew 10:28, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Never let us forget from what we have been saved.

Second, we are saved by the blood. A lamb was carefully chosen, one for each household. Some of the blood was splattered on the doorframes of the houses of the Israelites Exodus 12:13 reads, "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt." There was death in every house Egyptian household, but the Israelites were spared. The lamb was a substitute. The Israelites were spared, because the lamb was not spared.

The New Testament teaches that we are saved by the blood of a lamb. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and declared, "Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The Gospels are careful to point out that Jesus died at the time of Passover and they associate the Last Supper with the Passover meal itself. Peter uses Passover language when he writes in 1 Peter 1:18 that we were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." Again, there is a difference in that in the Old Testament, the Passover became an annual sacrifice. But Jesus' sacrifice is once for all. Again, Paul writes in Hebrews 7:27, "Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices repeatedly. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." One thing that remains the same is that the lamb's blood was not merely shed: it had to be applied. The blood of Christ is not just a concept, a theory or a debating point. It purifies us from all sin.

²Exodus 3:14

Third, we are saved to celebrate. Exodus 12:2 reads, “This month is to be for you the first month of your year.” So momentous was the Passover that it signaled the beginning of a whole new calendar. This was, after all, the people’s victory day. Pharaoh demanded the people to leave Egypt. They were set free. “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.”³

We too are saved to celebrate. 1 Peter 2:9 reads, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” The Passover celebrated deliverance for one nation. The body of Jesus was broken and his blood shed that all might come to God. Revelation 5 teaches that with his blood he has purchased people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

We are saved from destruction. We are saved by the blood. We are saved to celebrate. Let me be clear. Christmas is about salvation. Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, lived obediently to the Father’s will, suffered and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, was dead and buried and rose on the third day from the dead. Jesus Christ is the perfect lamb. His life and death is our Passover. The way has been made for all humanity to be passed over from death; eternal death that is. But there is a truth just like the days of the Israelites in Egypt. The Jews had to do what God had said in preparing their houses for the Passover at the tenth plague.

Such is the case when it comes to the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.” Who do you say Jesus Christ is? Your answer is essential for understanding and living the true meaning of Christmas. By believing in Jesus Christ you are saved from destruction. By believing in Jesus Christ you are saved by his blood. By believing in Jesus Christ you are saved to celebrate. But do you believe?

God is speaking to some of you right now. You know it. You feel it. If you want to surrender your life to the one who saved you from eternal destruction, saved you by his blood and saved you to celebrate then pray this prayer with me now in your pew. Would all heads bow, please? Will those who are praying the prayer simply raise their hand where they are and pray silently with me:

O God, I am a sinner. I am sorry for my sin. I am willing to turn from my sin. I receive Jesus as my Savior; I confess him as my Lord. From now on I want to follow him in the fellowship of his Church. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Passed over at Christmas. What a gift. There are new followers of Jesus tonight. Praise God for the family

³Exodus 12:14

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of followers of Jesus, not only at Eastminster but all around the world. Passed over at Christmas. Praise God for salvation from destruction. Praise God for salvation by the blood of Jesus. Praise God for salvation to celebrate. A Christmas Eve like no other. Passed over at Christmas. Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. Let us pray!

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1958 N. Webb Road • Wichita, Kansas 67206-3404 • p 316.634.0337 f 316.634.1496 • www.eastminster.org