

Monday, July 13, 2026

Deliverance: Born into the Family Business

Exodus 12-13; John 3:1-8

Tonight, we are continuing our journey through the Story, and we have reached one of the biggest moments in the entire Bible: the Exodus.

The Israelites have been enslaved in Egypt for generations. They have cried out to God, and God has heard them. God raises up Moses, speaks to him from a burning bush, and sends him to Pharaoh with the message, “Let my people go.”

Pharaoh refuses, so God begins sending plagues upon Egypt. The water turns to blood. Frogs invade the land. There are gnats, flies, diseases, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness. Each plague reveals that Pharaoh is not really in control. Egypt’s gods are not in control. The Lord alone is God.

Everything builds toward the tenth and final plague—the death of the firstborn.

But before we get to that moment, I want to begin with something that may seem completely unrelated. I want to talk about a little black box.

In the Jewish world, there is something called ****tefillin****. Everybody say, “Tefillin.”

Tefillin are small black boxes worn by some Jewish people during prayer. One box is attached near the forehead, and another is wrapped around the arm so that it rests close to the heart.

Why would someone do that?

In Deuteronomy, God tells His people to keep His commands upon their hearts, bind them to their hands and foreheads, and write them on the doorposts of their homes.

That is why Jewish homes may have a small container called a ****mezuzah**** attached to the doorframe. Inside the mezuzah is a small piece of parchment containing words from Scripture. The tefillin work similarly. Inside those little black boxes are tiny pieces of parchment containing commands from the Torah.

Here is the interesting part: Jewish tradition recognizes 613 commands in the Torah, but the tefillin do not contain all 613. They contain only a few selected passages.

One of them is the ****Shema****:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

Another says:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

Those make sense, right?

If you are going to choose some of the most important words in Scripture and place them near your mind and your heart, those seem like good choices. The Lord is God. Love Him with everything you have.

But another command placed inside the tefillin comes from Exodus 13, and it seems strange.

God says that every firstborn donkey must be redeemed with a lamb. If it is not redeemed, its neck must be broken. Then God says, “Redeem every firstborn among your sons.”

Of all the commands God could have chosen, why would this command about a firstborn donkey be placed in the little black box?

Why would Jewish people bind that command near their minds and hearts?

The next verse gives us a clue. Exodus 13:14 says:

“In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’”

God is saying, “When your children see this and ask why you are doing it, tell them the story. Tell them that you were slaves, but I rescued you. Tell them that the Exodus changed who you are.”

The command about the firstborn was never simply about a donkey. It was a reminder of Israel’s identity and calling.

To understand that, we have to go back to the night of the first Passover.

God tells the Israelites that the firstborn sons of Egypt will die. However, the Israelites are to take a lamb, sacrifice it, and place its blood on the doorframe of their home. When judgment comes, God will pass over the homes marked by the blood of the lamb.

This is the rescue moment. This is the moment they have been waiting for. This is the night when slavery will finally end.

But right as the story reaches its most intense moment, the Bible suddenly slows down.

Exodus 12 gives us a long list of instructions about how to prepare and eat the Passover meal.

As modern readers, we may want to say, “Can we finish the story first? Tell us how they escape. Tell us what happens to Pharaoh. Tell us about the Red Sea. Why are we stopping to talk about how to cook dinner?”

But when the Bible slows down and gives us details that seem strange, we should pay attention.

Rabbinic teachers noticed several strange details in the Passover instructions.

The Israelites are told not to boil the lamb in water. They must roast it.

They are told that the meal must be eaten together. If one family is too small to eat an entire lamb, they are supposed to join with another family. The Passover is not to be eaten alone.

They are told to “draw out” or “take out” a lamb from the flock.

Then they are told to dip hyssop into the lamb’s blood and place the blood on the doorframe.

Those instructions may seem random, but rabbinic readers noticed that they sound like another story we have already heard: the story of Joseph.

Joseph’s brothers hated him and threw him into a cistern. Genesis goes out of its way to tell us that the cistern was empty—there was no water in it.

At Passover, the lamb is not to be cooked in water.

After throwing Joseph into the empty cistern, the brothers sat down together to eat a meal.

At Passover, the people must eat the meal together.

Joseph was then drawn up out of the cistern.

At Passover, the Israelites are told to draw out a lamb from the flock.

Finally, Joseph’s brothers dipped his robe in blood and took it to their father.

At Passover, the Israelites dip hyssop into the blood of the lamb and place it upon the door.

The writer of Exodus appears to be using language that takes us back to Joseph.

That matters because Joseph is the reason Israel ended up in Egypt. Joseph was sold into slavery, but God raised him to a position of power. During a famine, Joseph's family came to Egypt looking for food. Eventually, their descendants became enslaved there.

The Passover story reaches backward into the Joseph story.

But the Joseph story also reaches backward into the story of Joseph's father, Jacob.

Jacob and Joseph have surprisingly similar stories.

Both are hated by their brothers.

Both are forced away from home.

Both end up serving in the home of a foreigner. Jacob serves Laban, and Joseph serves Potiphar.

Both are falsely accused. Jacob is accused of stealing Laban's household idols, while Joseph is accused by Potiphar's wife.

Both stories contain repeated groups of seven. Jacob works seven years for Leah and seven more years for Rachel. Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream about seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.

These stories are connected.

But what is the thread connecting Jacob, Joseph, and the Exodus?

The thread is the firstborn.

The Hebrew word for firstborn is ****bekhor****. Everybody say, "Bekhor."

Jacob wanted the position of the firstborn, but he was not the firstborn. Esau was. Jacob bought Esau's birthright and stole his father's blessing because Jacob wanted the inheritance and status of the firstborn son.

Joseph also was not technically Jacob's firstborn. Reuben was the oldest son. But Joseph was the firstborn son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, and Jacob treated Joseph as though he were the firstborn.

Jacob gave Joseph a special garment. The Hebrew description may suggest more than just a colorful coat. It represented status. It sent a message to the other brothers that Joseph was being elevated above them.

Jacob wanted to be the firstborn.

Joseph was treated like the firstborn.

Then we arrive at Exodus, where the final plague is the death of the firstborn.

And God says something incredibly important about Israel in Exodus 4:22:

"Israel is my firstborn son."

Suddenly, we see the thread.

Jacob wanted to be the firstborn.

Joseph was treated as the firstborn.

Now God looks at the entire nation of Israel and says, "You are My firstborn son."

This was an incredible honor, but we need to understand what being the firstborn meant.

The firstborn son received a double portion of the inheritance. He received more because he also carried more responsibility.

Being the firstborn was not simply about being the favorite. It was not simply about receiving extra money, extra land, or extra blessings.

The firstborn was responsible for carrying the father's values into the next generation.

The firstborn was expected to help care for the family. He was supposed to represent the father and help the younger siblings understand what the family stood for.

God was telling Israel, "I am bringing you out of Egypt, and I am inviting you to become My firstborn. I will bless you, but I am also giving you a responsibility. You are going to show the rest of the world what I am like."

Israel would carry God's teachings.

Israel would display God's justice.

Israel would demonstrate compassion for the poor, the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan.

Israel would show the nations what it looked like to worship the one true God.

God was not rescuing Israel so that Israel could sit back, celebrate, and forget everyone else.

God rescued Israel so that Israel could join His mission.

That brings us back to the strange Passover instructions.

Some rabbinic teachers have observed that the Passover meal contains the imagery of birth.

The lamb was prepared whole. One ancient interpretation describes the lamb as being arranged with its head drawn down toward its legs, almost like a baby curled inside the womb.

The Israelites placed blood around the doorway and then passed through that bloody opening as they left their old life in Egypt.

They left quickly, almost as though a new nation were being born.

Then they passed through the waters of the Red Sea.

Because of that imagery, some Jewish teachers have described the Red Sea as a kind of birth canal. Israel went down into the water as a nation of slaves and came out on the other side as God's firstborn son.

The Exodus was not simply an escape.

It was a birth.

Israel was being born into a new identity.

They were no longer Pharaoh's slaves. They were God's children.

They were no longer building Pharaoh's kingdom. They were joining God's kingdom.

They were no longer defined by Egypt. They would now be defined by their Father.

That helps us understand a conversation that takes place much later in John 3.

A religious leader named Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. Nicodemus knows the Scriptures. He is educated. He is respected. He is religious.

But Jesus tells him:

"No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

Nicodemus is confused. He asks how a grown person can possibly enter his mother's womb and be born a second time.

Jesus responds:

"No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit."

Christians have spent a lot of time debating exactly what Jesus meant by “water and Spirit.” But to someone who knew the story of Israel, those words would have sounded familiar.

Water and Spirit appear together at some of the Bible’s greatest moments of new creation.

In Genesis 1, the Spirit of God hovers over the waters, and creation begins.

The Hebrew word for spirit is **ruach**. It can mean spirit, breath, or wind.

During the flood story, the ruach—the wind—passes over the waters, and the waters begin to recede. The world begins again.

At the Red Sea, God sends a powerful ruach—a wind—over the water, the sea divides, and Israel passes through.

Water and Spirit.

Creation.

New creation.

Exodus.

New birth.

Jesus looks at Nicodemus and says, “You want to enter the kingdom of God? Then you must be born again.”

Jesus is not merely telling Nicodemus that he needs to become a slightly nicer version of himself.

Jesus is telling him that he needs a completely new identity.

He needs a new birth.

He needs a new Father.

He needs to leave his old kingdom and enter the kingdom of God.

That is what Jesus offers us.

Jesus does not merely offer to help us improve our behavior. Jesus offers to make us new.

Jesus is the true Passover Lamb whose blood rescues us from sin and death. Through His death and resurrection, He brings us out of slavery and into God's family.

But we need to understand something important: God does not only bring us ****out**** of something. He also brings us ****into**** something.

He brings us out of slavery to sin, but He brings us into His family.

He brings us out of darkness, but He brings us into His kingdom.

He brings us out of our old identity, but He brings us into a new identity.

And when God brings us into His family, He invites us to join the family business.

The family business is showing the world what our Father is like.

That means being born again is more than saying a prayer and waiting to go to heaven someday.

It means we begin living like our Father.

We show people His mercy.

We show people His grace.

We show people His patience.

We show people His generosity.

We show people His kindness.

We forgive because our Father forgives.

We welcome people because our Father welcomes people.

We care for those who are overlooked because our Father sees them.

We stand up for what is right because our Father is just.

We love people who cannot do anything for us because that is how our Father loves.

This is where the message becomes incredibly practical for you.

You carry the Father's values into your school.

You carry the Father's values onto your team.

You carry the Father's values into your friendships.

You carry the Father's values into your home.

You carry the Father's values onto social media.

That does not primarily mean arguing with everybody online. It does not mean posting something mean and then adding a Bible verse to it. It does not mean making sure everyone knows that you are right.

It means living in such a way that people catch a glimpse of what your Father is like.

When everyone is making fun of someone, you refuse to join in.

When gossip starts, you shut it down.

When someone is sitting alone, you make room.

When you hurt someone, you apologize.

When someone hurts you, you choose not to get revenge.

When a teammate fails, you encourage them instead of embarrassing them.

When everyone else is cheating, you tell the truth.

When you have something someone else needs, you share.

That is how we carry the Father's values.

God is putting the world back together, and He is looking for people who will join Him.

That is the invitation of the Exodus.

God says, "I will bring you out of slavery. I will make you My child. I will give you a new identity. And then I will send you back into the world to show everyone else what their Father is like."

So let me leave you with three truths.

First, **God wants to bring you out.**

Some of you are trapped in things that have become a kind of slavery. Maybe it is sin. Maybe it is shame. Maybe it is anger. Maybe it is the constant need for people's approval. Maybe it is something you keep returning to even though you know it is destroying you.

God is a God who hears the cries of slaves.

He is still a God who rescues.

Second, **God wants to bring you in.**

He does not rescue you and then leave you alone in the wilderness. Through Jesus, He brings you into His family. He gives you a new identity.

You are not defined by your worst mistake.

You are not defined by what other people call you.

You are not defined by your popularity, your appearance, your grades, your statistics, or how many people follow you.

When you belong to Jesus, you are a child of God.

Finally, **God wants to send you out.**

You have been given a place in the family, and with that place comes a responsibility.

You have been called to carry the Father's values.

Not just with your words.

Not just with what you post.

Not just inside this church building.

You carry His values through the way you actually live.

God did not rescue Israel just to get Israel out of Egypt. He rescued Israel so that Israel could show the world what He is like.

And God has not saved us simply so we can keep His love to ourselves.

We have been born into the family business.

We are here to show the rest of His children what our Father is like.

The question is: Are we willing to live like members of His family?