

EXODUS

תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה

40

Joy Restored

We are going to Exodus chapter 11 today.

Intro: What Could Have Been

When you read the stories of what the world was like at the beginning, before mankind fell, you hear about a world of joy, and beauty, and perfection, and abundance. You get a sense of the goodness of the world God made.

In the book of Job, God called the time of creation a time ***“when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy”*** Job 38:7

Genesis 1:2-3 says that the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. But then the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God speaks, and it is bright.

On the second day, God separated heaven and earth, he put an expanse of water in the sky and separated it from the water on the ground. God speaks and there’s a place to live, protected from what’s above and below.

On the third day, the earth brought forth vegetation: fruit trees and all kinds of good things to enjoy. There is food and amazing tastes to be discovered everywhere.

On the fifth day, God said “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures” and they did - life was springing up in water everywhere as God spoke it into existence.

On the sixth day, in Genesis 1:25 “God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind”

And then, to rule over his creation, God made man from the dust of the ground.

And God would come and walk with man in the garden in the cool of the day. God ruled over man, man ruled over the earth. They were to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, starting with Eden, a paradise garden temple where man could worship God and rule His creation.

Then sin entered. Man turned from God. And that broke everything.

It began a long war against God.

We fast forward to Exodus, and Pharaoh, the most powerful leader in the world, is shaking his fist at God and saying, "Who is this Yahweh, that I should obey him?," which is the question and the posture of humanity since Eden.

So God sent plagues to unravel creation itself - to reverse the creation in Genesis. The waters that God had created that were teeming with life turned to blood and all the fish died.

The balance God had created between the birds, the fish, the creeping things all got thrown out of whack and frogs covered the land. Then the frogs died and the stench of death was everywhere.

Then, out of the dust of the earth from which God had created man, gnats came and covered man. Then flies came that ate some of the vegetation.

Then the livestock died. Boils covered man and beast.

Hail rained down, with mankind no longer protected from the waters above.

The locusts came to eat every bit of vegetation that was left after the other plagues.

What had once teemed with life was now a barren wasteland. The sons of Adam could look around and see the utter mess they had created. It was like Adam and Eve had set off a bomb in Eden, and during these plagues you see the desolation.

**Exodus 10:21-23 "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt."
22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. 23 They did not see one another, nor did**

anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.”

So now there is darkness again. Genesis started with darkness, and God spoke light and life into existence. But the plagues reverse the creation and now it's darkness - a darkness that even overcomes lamps in the dwellings of Egypt. A darkness they could feel. And a completely isolating darkness: they didn't see each other.

They were made for family and community but couldn't even see each other in the day time. This is what our sin does - it unravels the fabric of society and creation that God had made and called good. It disintegrates relationships, it brings ruin and destruction.

Everyone is alone, everything is dark. This is where mankind's rebellion against God has led - total destruction, total isolation, total darkness. And there's one more plague to come:

Exodus 11:1 “The LORD said to Moses, “Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will drive you away completely. 2 Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, for silver and gold jewelry.” 3 vAnd the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

4 So Moses said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, 5 and 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. 6 There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again. 7 But 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.’ 8 And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, ‘Get out, you and all the people who follow you.’ And after that I will go out.” And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. 9 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not listen to you, that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.”10 Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

So now the firstborn will die.

This is where turning from God has taken us. The bible begins with the sons of God singing, with light being spoken into existence, with the water and land teeming with life, with man coming from the dust of the ground, with people being told to be fruitful and multiply.

And now the dust has turned to gnats, the water and land are filled with death, there is darkness, and the sons of Egypt dying. Sin brings about a complete unraveling of God's design, a complete reversal of what God had built.

And God had given so much warning.

Back in **Exodus 4:22** **“Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.”**”

God had said, “Pharaoh, what you are doing, you are doing to my firstborn son. These are my children you are oppressing and killing. And if you keep it up, this will come back on you - you will reap what you're sowing in your own homes, you will feel what I feel as my children are being mistreated.

God warned Pharaoh, and followed up that warning with some miracles and 9 plagues before he ever carried it out. But Pharaoh kept hardening his heart, he kept refusing, and God keeps his promises.

So now the final judgment would come. God was going to settle the score.

But why? We tend to not like to think of God like Exodus tells us to think of God. He seems so vengeful. Why does God need to punish sin? Can't he just let it go?

This picture of God as a judge who makes sure every sin is paid for perfectly can be alienating, like He is some kind of monster who would act this way.

On the one hand, we just can't conceive of a God who is a judge.

But on the other hand, we almost know it has to be this way.

First, we all know we have guilt. Even if we don't think God's standards are the right ones, we all have standards, and we have all broken them. Tim Keller uses the example: Imagine you had a tape recorder hanging around your neck that only recorded the judgments you've made of others: She is a liar. I could never forgive him because his sin is too serious. His motives are shady. We've all said things judging others, and even if our words were the only standard, we still all fall short of our own standards. So we know we have guilt that somehow has to be dealt with.

And we also know that when somebody falls short, a payment has to be made.

We know that somebody has to pay for at least certain sins. If one of my kids throws a baseball through a neighbor's window, that neighbor can forgive, but somebody has to buy a window. So I would buy it (and then my kid would have a whole list of bonus chores to pay off that debt.) Or, if my neighbor insisted on paying for it, than she could pay for it. But that window doesn't get fixed without somebody paying. Nothing gets better without a payment. So every debt has to be settled somehow.

Sin damages. The fix needs to be purchased.

On top of that, we know that at least certain sins can never be fully paid for by a person. We know that, at least certain sins deserve infinite, eternal punishment. We saw this in the #metoo movement. Sins from 20 and 30 years ago are brought up because they still matter, and there's a sense that no amount of punishment, public shame, and loss of a job will be enough. You see it on the internet with the piling on that happens when some celebrity is exposed to have done something really horrible. People pile on and they want blood - no confession fixes the sin. No amount of contrition is sufficient payment. With certain sins, we still sense the need for infinite punishment. And with some, even when somebody gets the death penalty, we sense that they got off too easy. Even that wasn't enough.

So we know we've sinned. We know a price has to be paid. And for some, it seems like that price will never be enough.

But what if we're just numb to how serious sin really is except in the extreme cases? What if those things we can still sense in the extreme cases are true in all cases of sin? Because they all unravel creation, they all lead to damage, they all offend the infinite holiness of God?

Then we start to make sense of God punishing sin, and we make sense of at least some of the harshness of wrath and hell and death. God made it good, we destroyed it, and now there is a price to be paid.

Which is not a message of joy.

Until you get to the surprising hero of the story.

Exodus 12 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 2 “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. 3 Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. 4 And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, 6 and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

7 “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8 They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. 10 And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11 In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. 13 The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

So the Egyptians will be plagued, but the Jews will be rescued. And they'll be rescued from the destroyer *by a lamb*. A lamb will die, and in all of the houses where the blood is put on the doorpost, everyone will live.

And this event will be the central holiday in Judaism: the passover. It is the defining event. The time that God rescued his people from Egypt, and spared them because of

the blood of the lamb. Their identity as a people is centered on this event where God rescued them from Egypt.

This day when God passed over the homes where the lambs died is the event that is rehearsed year after year. The time that the lamb saved the day.

And this isn't the first time or the last time that a lamb would save the day.

Back in Genesis, God told Abraham to sacrifice his son. And at the last moment, God provides a ram (a mature lamb) to be sacrificed instead. Lambs are sacrificed all throughout the Old Testament as substitutes for sinners.

And then you get to the New Testament, and John the Baptist is introducing Jesus to the world, and it says in John 1:29, **“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” 32 And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”**

So this is how Jesus is introduced. He is the great one, one so great that John isn't worthy to tie his sandals. But also, he is the lamb.

Which had to have been incredibly confusing for the people hearing him. Because how could he be the great one, and the lamb?

You'd expect in this list of titles maybe “Lion”. This would be a good place to say He's the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel, and the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” That would be true. But instead, He's introduced as the lamb.

And the people hearing this were mostly Jewish, which means that what would come to mind for them would be the sacrifice of the lamb. This was an animal that was always connected to the sacrifice in their minds.

For us, if we think about a turkey, we immediately think Thanksgiving dinner. It's an

animal that really has one main use in our country, to be stuffed with dressing and eaten with potatoes and corn and cranberry sauce. That's what turkeys are for - they are created for Thanksgiving Day. You can't think about Turkeys without thinking about Thanksgiving.

Just like we go immediately from Turkey to thanksgiving, they would go immediately from lamb to sacrifice. The lamb had one main use in Israel - to be sacrificed. The lamb is mentioned 71 times in the old testament. 65 of them are talking about sacrificing the lamb.

So Jesus is introduced as the great one, but also the one who came as the lamb.

You fast forward a few more years, and it is the night that Jesus is betrayed by Judas before he is taken to the cross. And it's the passover.

Mark 14:16 "And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

22 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24 And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

So they eat the passover, and Jesus changes the symbolism. The person who leads the passover meal would typically say something like, "This is the bread of our affliction our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt." But Jesus breaks the bread and says, "This is my body."

And at this feast, there is no lamb. Because the lamb would be slain on the cross the next day. The death of the lamb would have all new meaning. Jesus would die, his blood would be spilled, and all of those who are associated with Him by faith would be passed over when the destroyer comes.

When we eat the Lord's supper, we are saying that we believe that, as crazy as it sounds, because the blood of the lamb was spilled, we will not be condemned. He was condemned for us.

So every time we take this meal, we encourage Christians to confess our sins, to renounce our sins, all in confidence that because the lamb was slain, because of His affliction, we are pardoned.

In Exodus, the fact that the Jews needed the blood of the lamb meant that they were guilty too. They deserved what the Egyptians were getting. We're all guilty, we're all condemnable. But the lamb (or more accurately, the one the lamb symbolized) took their place and paid their debt.

And Jesus took the Passover and showed that its ultimate meaning was that He was the lamb who would come to pay our debt, to take our guilt, to be our substitute.

And then you go to the end of the Bible, the end of the story God is telling with history, and in the book of Revelation, John sees a vision of people from every nation worshipping. And it says:

Revelation 7:13-17 “Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?’ 14 I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 ‘Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

The Lamb is on the throne! He is the great one, who was slain, and whose blood made us pure.

And this is where this is a message of joy.

Jesus is the solution for our guilt.

Sometimes we attempt to suppress our guilt and say we are OK on our own. But it doesn't work because it so goes against the grain of reality. We know we've fallen short. Our own words and standards judge us.

Sometimes, on the other hand, we wallow in our guilt like there's no solution. Like we will only ever be guilty worms who can never make things better.

But Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

We don't have to be laden with guilt and shame, and feel forever defiled by what we've done. We confess our sin, we mourn over our sin, we renounce it, we wage war on it. But ultimately the solution to our sin is that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And now we can know that we will be passed over by the destroyer.

And sometimes we wonder if God would hear us or answer our prayers, because of how we've fallen short. We wonder if we could be Christians, if we are saved, if we are OK with God.

In Egypt, some of these Jews were very moral and devout. Some were not. There were relatively good guys and bad guys among them. But if they believed in the words of God enough to put the blood of the lamb on the doorpost, they were rescued.

They were saved by grace through faith, not by works. If they acknowledged their need of a sacrificial lamb, if they responded by faith and did the crazy thing that putting blood on doorposts is, they were rescued.

And in the same way, we as Christians have all kinds of backgrounds. Some have been worse than others. Some are here today feeling like they're doing OK in their walk with God, some are here saying they're really struggling. And wondering how could I pray? How could I expect God to use me? How could I ever be forgiven?

It's not what you do. It is the blood of the lamb.

I'm sure in Egypt, some Jews said, "God is going to protect us because of blood on our house? I can't believe that. But OK, I'll give it a shot." And if the blood of the lamb was there, they were rescued.

Others probably had total confidence and slept deeply the night of the passover, because the blood of the lamb would work, and they were rescued.

Whether they had weak faith or strong faith, they were saved by the blood of the lamb.

And if you have weak faith that says, “I almost don’t believe this will work” but you trust in Jesus and what He did for you, or if you have strong faith that says, “Of course this will work, God says it!” and you believe - either way, if you trust that Jesus is the lamb that was slain for you, you are redeemed.

Jesus is the Way to Approach God

Sometimes, in our guilt, we run from God. We don’t pray, we don’t worship, we don’t read the Bible, we don’t seek Him. We rightly feel that we could just never go to God and be accepted by Him on our own.

On the other hand, sometimes as guilty as we are, we skip to God thinking, “God accepts me just the way I am!” And we don’t repent, there isn’t reverence, there isn’t trembling before God, it’s like He’s a whole different God than the one He is revealed to be in Exodus.

The answer is the blood of the lamb.

Yes, my sin keeps me from God. And no, God doesn’t accept me the way that I am. I am accepted because of the blood of the lamb! We cling to Jesus by faith and approach God boldly.

Jesus Shows Us the Incredible Love of God

When you doubt God’s love because of circumstances, when you look at how life is going (especially this time of year when we are so prone to compare our actual life to our expectations), the place to look is the cross. Jesus became the lamb for us. The great one became the least and suffered the most so we could look to him by faith and be forgiven. And all of the worries and fears at Christmas time that threaten to shake our hearts can meet their match in the love of God that was demonstrated for us on the cross. He became the lamb that was slain for us, and while we look around and see evidence that could convince us that He is against us, we can look to the cross and see the lamb slain for us to be reminded that He loves us.

Just as the passover was the center of Jewish identity, the true and better passover and exodus story of the cross and resurrection is the center of ours. It’s what makes us who we are, it’s the place we anchor our hearts. And it is our confidence that the future is filled with joy because the destroyer doesn’t destroy us.

When you go to the very end of the Bible, **Revelation 19:6** “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure’—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

The end of this age is described as the marriage supper of the Lamb. A wedding feast, where we rejoice and exult and give Him glory. Because He was slain for us, so we could be so loved and accepted by Him that we could be described as His bride. So we could be so purified that we could be said to be bright and pure and ready to meet the lamb.

Exodus 11-12
Joy Restored

I. The warning given (Exodus 11:1-10)

II. The unlikely hero (Exodus 12:1-13)

III. Joy Restored

For Discussion in Small Groups:

- 1) Discuss the need for the price for sin to be paid.
- 2) In what ways does the picture of God presented in Exodus clash with some of our modern notions of what God *should* be like?
- 3) Why is the passover observance so central to the lives of Jews today?
- 4) Why is the message of the passover also central to Christians?
- 5) How is the Lamb the hero of the story for Christians?