



We are in week four of our sermon series, The Story. Two weeks ago we looked at Joseph's incredible life of being sold into slavery by his brothers, yet saving his family who betrayed him and the entire region from starvation. When the curtain closes in Genesis, the people of God are a small tribal family enjoying prosperity in Egypt. When the action begins in Exodus, they have grown to approximately 2 million people, living under intense bondage and cruel oppression.

Before we get into the story itself and our passage for today, I have a question that helps us understanding the bigger story. Did you know that God intentionally sent his people to Egypt? When God made the covenant with Abraham he told Abraham that this would happen.

Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there (Exodus 15:13).

Why did God send his people to Egypt? To escape the famine. Egypt had food, but there's more to it than this. In Egypt the Israelites experienced two things they could not have in the Promised Land: 1) they had the most powerful nation in the world protecting them—Egypt, and 2) due to the culture and religions in Egypt, they were prohibited from intermarrying foreigners. This resulted in an incubator environment for God's people to grow from one family into a nation. God intentionally sent his people to Egypt so they could safely grow numerically into a sizable nation.

Isn't that comforting to know? God rules and works seemingly pointless circumstances to an ultimate good purpose. I bet all of us have been thinking about the Ebola virus this past week since our nation experienced its first death in Dallas. How is God working through this? With the conflict with ISIS in Syria, how is God working through this? And as petrifying as both of these are, some experts are saying we should be much more concerned with the invasion of our privacy through our phones and computers. How is God working through these changes in our world?

As we read about how God worked in the past, we have a better understanding of how God is working today. And the simple explanation is—don't fear, God is in control. God is working a plan. And it's a plan of salvation for anyone who will trust in God.

Under the protection of Egypt, the Israelites have grown to 2 million. In fact, they've grown so much that the Pharaoh fears their power if they were to rebel. So he issues a horrific decree to kill all the Hebrew baby boys. Think of the hardness of heart a person must possess to order such action. History is filled with such men.

This is an obvious sign that the safe incubator of Egypt is no longer safe. God sets the plan in motion to get his people out of the land.

God's Plan

Moses is born around a Hebrew midwife who refuses to follow Pharaoh's order to kill the newborn babies. The daughter of Pharaoh found Moses as he floated down to her in a basket and had compassion for him. She adopted him and Moses grew up in the palace in Egypt.

These were two key events that God set in motion. God was preparing Moses, as a child, for his role and his purpose that he would fulfill 80 years later. Forty years later, Moses messed up the plan by killing an Egyptian slavemaster which resulted in Moses fleeing Egypt to save his life. Then for 40 more years Moses herded animals in the mountainous desert. Meanwhile the mistreatment of God's people in Egypt continued.

When God determined that all of the circumstances were right, the timing was right and Moses was ready to fulfill his purpose, at age 80, he revealed himself to Moses through a burning bush. In Exodus 3:6 God tells him who He is.

Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

And God tells Moses the plan in verse 10.

So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.

The resulting events of Moses' life are so spectacular that one 5-year-old boy said this to his mother: "Well, mom, today we learned how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, his army built a pontoon bridge so all the people could get across safely. Then Moses called in bombers and attack helicopters to destroy the bridge and all the Israelites were saved. The mother was stunned, "Honey is that really what they taught

you?" The little boy smiled, "No, but if I told you what really happened, you'd never believe it!"

When Moses tells Pharaoh of God's plan, Pharaoh is dismissive and disregards both Moses and Moses' God. The Pharaoh is a simple man who understands ruling with one method—brute power. He never shows the art of compromise and negotiation; he never shows feelings of empathy for anyone. The pharaoh was the kind of man who relied on bullying the powerless to maintain his power. He was the kind of man who crushed weak people and promoted powerful people.

So God showed Pharaoh just how much more powerful he was with 10 plagues. Each of these plagues was a demonstration of superiority over an Egyptian false god. And as the plagues rolled out, 1 by 1, everybody saw—Pharaoh, the Egyptians and the Israelites—that the God Moses worshipped was the most powerful god in the world. God gave his people, his forming nation, a front row seat to his power on display. His people needed to know that he was real, powerful and working for their protection and salvation.

Here's a brief explanation of the 10 plagues:

- » Turning the Nile to blood. Isis was the Egyptian god of the Nile. Khnum was the guardian of the Nile.
- » Frogs. Heget was the goddess of birth and had the head of a frog.
- » Gnats. Set was the god of the desert.
- » Flies. Ra was the sun god. Uatchit was a god possibly represented by the fly.
- » Death of livestock. Hathor, goddess with a cow's head. Apis was the bull god.
- » Boils. Sekmet, goddess that had power over disease. Sunu, the god of pestilence.
- » Hail. Nut, the goddess of the sky. Set, god of storms.
- » Locusts. Osiris, god of crops.
- » Darkness. Ra, the sun god. Horus, a sun god. Hathor, sky goddess.
- » Death of firstborn. Min, god of reproduction. Isis, goddess who protected children. Pharaoh, considered a god.

So Moses said, "This is what the Lord says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well' (11:4–5).

Imagine the devastation on our church if this plague hit. It would be heartbreaking. Multiply that millions of times to grasp the

heartbreak for the nation of Egypt. As we read through these events, your heart just pleads that Pharaoh will relent and just let the Israelites leave. But he doesn't.

The Lord had said to Moses, "Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you—so that my wonders may be multiplied in Egypt." Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country (11:9–10).

Let's go on a slight tangent together so I can address the topic of God hardening Pharaoh's heart. This is an important topic to clarify because misunderstanding could lead to slandering God's character. What it **didn't** mean—God didn't impose hardness on Pharaoh's heart while Pharaoh innocently received it. What it **did** mean—Pharaoh was a stubborn, prideful, cruel and uncompromising man who made decisions in alignment with his weak and flawed character. As he spiraled deeper and deeper, God allowed him to go there. In contrast, often God will speak during these times to a person and call them to repentance. That's not the case with Pharaoh. When the scriptures say that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, it means that Pharaoh's decisions hardened his own heart and God did nothing to stop it or to change him.

That's mysterious, for sure. But it's also the only place in all of scripture where something like this happened. The rest of scripture describes God as unconditionally loving, gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

Now, let's return to the story that's unfolding with the plagues hitting Egypt and the 10th plague coming. In Exodus 12:1-11, God gives specific instructions to the Israelites regarding their actions and this 10th plague.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. Do

not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover."

In these instructions we see God providing two things: establishing a calendar year for his new nation, and giving them physical reminders, symbols you could say, of spiritual lessons.

The perfect lamb would have been raised in the family, its blood is spread on the doorframe of the house.

Food—meat from the lamb to remind them of its sacrifice; bitter herbs to remind them of the bitterness of their slavery; unleavened bread to remind them that God worked quickly.

Clothing—As they eat, their cloak is tucked into their belt, sandals are on and they're holding their staff.

Eat quickly—Even their action of eating quickly is a reminder and a lesson.

In these next verses God explains how the blood of the lamb on the doorframe will save them from the 10th plague of death to the firstborn males.

"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. 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" (12:12–13).

The destructive plague will pass over their house when God sees the blood on the doorpost. The key lesson of this 10th plague is that God will provide salvation for his people by the blood of the perfect lamb.

Lastly, in Exodus 12:14–16 God instructs them to remember this event annually with a festival. It's like a national holiday, a time to remember how God rescued his people.

"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. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat; that is all you may do."

God set up the structure of an annual festival so his people would always remember how he saved them from slavery. I asked a Jewish leader this past week about the Passover. They still celebrate it with a meal called the Seder. I asked him what it means to them. For them it is a reminder of God's physical rescue from slavery and oppression. During the holiday presently they identify with people worldwide who are enslaved or oppressed, such as the Civil Rights movement or people caught in the sex trade. But there's no spiritual meaning for them, no acknowledgment that God used a physical rescue to demonstrate and teach a much more profound spiritual rescue is coming, that Jesus Christ will rescue his people from the slavery of sin by his blood.

The term *lamb* is simply used, in this case, to signify the sacrifice, i.e., the sacrificial victim, to pay for something. **"They must rededicate themselves to the Lord for the same period of dedication and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering"** (Num. 6:12). This was one part of the elaborate Israelite sacrificial system they practiced for generations and generations. But there was always meant to be more.

In Isaiah 53:7 the Old Testament prophet is predicting what will happen to the Messiah when he comes. **"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth' he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."**

Moving ahead to the beginning of the New Testament, when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming, the Holy Spirit gave him divine insight and he said, **"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29).

One final example, after Jesus died and rose from the dead, the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5:7, calls Jesus Christ our Passover lamb. God worked an amazing miracle when he rescued his 2 million slaves from Egypt. God worked and is still working an even more amazing miracle by rescuing millions and millions of people from the slavery of sin and death.

When Jesus started his ministry he said these words, **"He (God) has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free"** (Isa. 61:1). When Jesus died on the cross and rose again, he became the sacrificial lamb whose blood would cover the sins of a rebellious, lost and hurting humanity. God offers salvation to anyone who calls on his name.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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