

*“Never Forget Who You Belong To”*

Exodus 13:1-22

December 8, 2024

Thank you – expressions of love (dad’s passing wed morning)

Prayer for Millie’s family (passed away Friday night)

The vast majority of self-inflicted troubles in life are the result of forgetting who we belong to.

- We make choices out of a *love of self* rather than to please God, forgetting we belong to Him.
- We live for the *praise of man* rather than the glory of God, forgetting we belong to Him.
- We make compromises out of the *fear of man* rather than courageously fearing God, forgetting we belong to Him.

So much of our waywardness is the result of pretending we belong to ourselves or someone else other than God. As we come to Exodus 13, God will graciously prescribe customs for His people to help them remember that they belong to Yahweh and Yahweh alone, thus sparing them from a thousand needless offenses before God and one another.

The overarching exhortation of Exodus 13 is this: **Don’t forget what Yahweh, your Redeemer, has done and therefore, who you belong to.** As we walk through chapter 13, I’m going to highlight 5 key truths to remember.

1. **Remember who God is and His power to redeem** (Ex 13:3-10).

Don’t forget who God is and His mighty hand to save! [**vs. 3-10**] Verses 3-10 are a reiteration of God’s instructions to annually celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, including Passover, for two reasons. First, it was a reminder to never forget the great things God had done in delivering His people out of slavery in Egypt. Second, the feast was a means of instruction for the coming generations who had not experienced it for themselves. In other words, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a time of worship and generational discipleship to secure and affirm their faith in Yahweh.

As we discovered last week, eating unleavened bread for 7 days after Passover was a vivid reminder of how the Israelites had to leave Egypt quickly, not allowing time for bread to rise. We also discovered that they were to remove all leaven from their homes for the feast. Vs. 7 declares it was not to be seen in all their territory! This signified their need to be sanctified, set apart from the influence of sin and the world. In other words, as they ventured into the land of Canaan, they were to remember that they belonged to the Lord and that their lives were not to be permeated by the influence of other pagan nations like Egypt (5).

It is precisely because God’s people had been redeemed and set apart as His own, that that they were to use the Feast of Unleavened Bread to teach their children about what God had done for them, giving them a new identity as the people of God, distinct from the world. Vs. 8 makes it clear that remembering involves testifying and teaching, instilling into the hearts of their kids the testimony of God’s great deliverance from the oppression of the world.

Yet this was not only to be an annual reminder. Vs. 9 says, *“it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes., that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt.”* In other words, God has done something so great that you should never stop talking about it. It should always be present in your conversation, as present as your hands. I should be kept in view wherever your eyes roam. The one thing that you must never forget is the great things God has done to redeem you (miraculous plagues & supernatural deliverance from Egypt’s oppression).

It’s worth pointing out that God’s strong hand is referenced four times in chapter 13 [**3, 9, 14, 16**]. What’s the significance of God’s strong hand that delivered them? God’s strong hand reveals who God is in His power and authority. It’s a way of saying, “Don’t forget the strength of Yahweh. Don’t forget that He has the power to deliver and the power to judge. Yahweh is the Lord and there is no other. His glory is unrivaled in all the earth.”

***Living in light of God’s sovereign power, His sufficient grace, and His just judgment deters us from turning to other gods or forsaking Him for false***

**securities.** So the Lord says, tell your children about the strength of God—He is to be feared and trusted! Tell your children about the grace of God—He is merciful to deliver! Speak always of the goodness and greatness of God to attract their hearts to love and trust Him. And mark it not only with your daily conversation, but also with a special feast every year to celebrate the blessing of His redeeming claim on their lives.

We no longer celebrate Passover annually as the OT Jews did because Christ is the fulfillment of Passover as the Passover Lamb of God who takes away our sin (1Cor 5:6-8). The Feast of Unleavened Bread finds its fulfillment in the sinless life of Christ offered up to God as a sacrifice for our redemption. These great truths are celebrated each time we partake of the Lord's Supper. The unleavened bread represents the sinless life of Jesus, and the cup represents His blood of sacrifice in our place.

Yet there is a principle that remains for us to heed in chapter 13. **Nothing is more important for parents to teach their children than the strong hand of the Lord to redeem.** God's goodness, grace, and greatness should be constant themes in our conversation. Never further away than our hands and never lacking in our vision of life.

## 2. Remember to whom you exclusively belong as the redeemed (Ex 13:1-2, 11-16).

Now we move into a portion of our passage that seems foreign and strange to us, yet its implications are deeply personal and instructive for our walk with God. **[1-2, 11-16]**

The command is stated in vs. 2, and then restated and clarified in vs. 12. Israel was to consecrate or set apart every firstborn son and every firstborn male animal as belonging to God. Why just the *firstborn males*? In ancient culture, the firstborn son represented the whole family, like the captain of a soccer team represents the whole team or a CEO represents the whole company.<sup>1</sup> The firstborn son's role entailed special responsibilities and

privileges, including being the executor of his Father's estate. Redeeming the firstborn was a way of saying the whole family belongs to God. Furthermore, God had taken the firstborn sons of Egypt and the firstborn of their cattle, thus Israel is to commemorate what God had done with this stark reminder of consecrating their own sons and livestock to the Lord.

What does this word *consecrate* in vs. 2 mean? To *consecrate* means to make something holy, to set it apart, by giving it to God or reserving it for His use. To *redeem* is to buy back through the payment of a price.<sup>2</sup> So, every firstborn male animal was to either be sacrificed to the Lord or redeemed (bought back) by the sacrifice of another animal. Every firstborn son was also to be redeemed (bought back) by a sacrificial lamb.

God is using this process of consecration and redemption to ensure that his people never forget how God redeemed them. Back in Ex 4:22-23 the Lord said to Pharaoh, "*Israel is My firstborn son. Let My son go that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.*" And that is just what God did. He killed the firstborn sons of Egypt and redeemed the sons of Israel through the Passover lamb—thus demonstrating that *He is Lord over all.*

The exodus from Egypt was the redemption of Israel, God's firstborn son, out of slavery (cf. Hos 11:1).<sup>3</sup> So when God redeemed Israel, it meant that Israel belonged to God—they are His people and no one else's, not even their own. Does this sound familiar? When Jesus redeemed us by dying in our place, it resulted in God's exclusive ownership of us—and that's a blessing! In calling us to flee immorality, 1Corinthians 6 says, "*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body*" (1Cor 6:19-20). Again in 1Cor 7:23, "*You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.*"

So in Ex 13, God set in place a system of redemption of the firstborn so that they would never forget who they belonged to. The Lord wanted every

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 338.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Ryken, *Exodus* (Preaching the Word), pg. 340.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Ryken, *Exodus* (Preaching the Word), pg. 338.

generation to understand that they were set apart for God. They did not belong to themselves, and they did not belong to the world. They belong to God. As they came out of Egypt, they were not to identify with Egypt any longer—they are to clean out the old leaven of Egyptian influence. When they come into the land of Canaan where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites, and Jebusites live, they are not to identify with them, but with the God of heaven. This is about deciding what the culture of your life will be based on your identity—you belong to Yahweh!

If it bothers your modern sense of autonomy or personal independence to think about not belonging to yourself, it may be helpful to keep in mind that all people rightfully belong to God by means of creation. We have been made in God's image and bear the stamp of His likeness. We belong to God as our Creator. Now, let's dig in a little deeper...

This command to consecrate the firstborn males involved both animals and boys. Let's begin with the animals. According to vs. 12 every firstborn animal was to be sacrificed to the Lord. But there's an exception for donkeys in vs. 13. A firstborn donkey was not to be sacrificed, but either redeemed with a lamb or killed. Why? Donkeys were ceremonially unclean. God declared some animals clean (worthy of sacrifice) and others unclean (unworthy of sacrifice). This was an object lesson to teach the Israelites to make a distinction between what is holy and unholy, so that they would understand that they were to be holy (set apart for God's service). Because a donkey was considered unholy, it was an unacceptable sacrifice, so it had to be killed or redeemed (bought back through the sacrifice of a lamb). Did you notice that whether clean or unclean, *God has rights of ownership to all things. Everything belongs to the Lord!*

Now, what about firstborn sons? Verse 13 seems to put sons and donkeys in the same category, with the exception that sons should not be killed. They must be redeemed. Donkeys were *ceremonially* unclean, people are *morally* unclean—sinners. Neither were a worthy sacrifice. So, let's put this together. As image-bearers of our Creator, we are to be set apart as holy unto the Lord. Yet we are sinners and therefore unclean. Thus, we belong to God by creation, have rebelled against him as sinners, and now need to be redeemed through a worthy (unblemished) sacrifice in our place. Can you

see how Ex 13 is pointing to Christ? His unblemished, sinless life was given as a substitutionary sacrifice to redeem us from our sin and restore us to God's rightful ownership of us. Believer, you are doubly God's by virtue of creation and redemption. Never forget to whom you belong. Christian, your identity is in Christ alone. You have been created and redeemed to live for God's good pleasure, not merely your own selfish pleasure.

Now for those of you who think it's scrooge-like of me to be preaching from Exodus during the Christmas season, Exodus 13 has an interesting connection to the birth of Christ. A short time after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus, *their firstborn son*, to the temple to present Him to the Lord. Luke 2:23 references Exodus 13:2—Mary and Joseph were fulfilling the requirements of Exodus 13. **[Luke 2:22-24]** They offered a sacrifice of a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons which was an acceptable sacrifice for a family too poor to bring a lamb. Jesus didn't need to be redeemed of sin, but like His baptism, he needed to fulfill all righteousness which included keeping the law. As Mary and Joseph consecrated their firstborn, it was a way of saying, "He belongs to Yahweh and Yahweh alone. He's not our son, but God's."

Later in Numbers 18:14-16, allowance was made to redeem a son for five shekels of silver. And 1 Peter 1:18-19 tells us that we were redeemed "not with perishable things such as silver [like the five shekels to redeem a son], but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish." When Jesus gave His life on the cross, He represented and redeemed all of God's family as God's firstborn. The cross of Christ was our Exodus 13 redemption payment.

The purpose of Christmas is the cross. And the purpose of the cross is to redeem us, to bring us back under the authority, security, and care of our Heavenly Father. The kind of fatherly care and wisdom the Israelites will begin to experience in vss. 17-22. The opening question of the Heidelberg Catechism points to what Christmas and the Cross accomplish for the believer. Let's read the question and answer together:

***"What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus***

**Christ, who at the cost of His own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that He protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit His purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him”** (Heidelberg Confession).

Church, never forget to whom you belong! *It is blessing to live for Him.*

**3. Remember that God leads with the wisdom and care of a wise father** (Ex 13:17-18).

Pay close attention to vss. 17-18. They are remarkable. **[17-18]** The essence of vss. 17-18 is that God does not take His people on the shortest route. He took them the long way through the wilderness because He is a wise Father who knows the weaknesses of His children. He knew they were not ready to face the Philistines in war. And He knew they would need the training ground of the wilderness to grow and mature in their ability to trust God with faithful obedience.

God knew that their immaturity would tempt them to run back to the old slave master of Egypt when faced with the possibility death at the hands of the Philistines. So God set them on the long road through the wilderness.

If you feel as though you are on a long wilderness road, take courage that our heavenly Father is wise and is working purposely through the hardships and the perseverance they require to strengthen your faith and to bolster your obedience.

The wilderness road is the road to maturity. It's a long road, yet one that can lead to great blessing. On this road God will reveal what's in your heart and give you opportunities to experience His heart. Only God determines how long our wilderness road will be, yet we can choose to grow toward maturity if we are willing to humbly surrender our self-will and independence to our wise Father. We must remember that God, in His wisdom and care for us,

often delivers by way of the long road to maturity. Don't waste the journey. Learn to walk with God.

**4. Remember that God will not fail those who trust in Him** (Ex 13:19).

Vs. 19 may seem a bit strange and yet it points us to the faithfulness of God. **[vs. 19]** Did you catch the evidence of Joseph's faith in verse 19? "God will surely visit you!" In other words, Joseph had complete confidence in God's future deliverance of His people. Joseph spoke these words in Genesis 50 just before he died because He was trusting in what God had told Abraham, 3 generations earlier, that his descendants would be oppressed in a foreign land as slaves for 400 years. Yet God would deliver them, bring judgment on their oppressors, and take them back to the promised land.

So, when Moses honors Joseph's request and carries his bones out of Egypt it is *a validation of both Joseph's faith and the faithfulness of God to keep His promises*. God will not fail those who trust in His promises. Oh, the wilderness road may be long and winding, full of surprises and disappointments, but God's faithfulness will guarantee that His wise purposes are accomplished for our ultimate good and His supreme glory.

**5. Remember that God is always present with His people to guide them** (Ex 13:20-22).

Chapter 13 ends on a beautiful note. **[20-22]** God manifested His presence before the people as a pillar of cloud that led them by day and a pillar of fire that led them by night. This is a representation of God's constant presence, going before them, and never departing from them. His visible presence would guide them, provide light for them, and even protect them (14:20).

We may not be able to see God's presence today as Israel did in the wilderness, but we have the same promise of the constancy of His presence with us. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, Jesus promised His disciples (and us!) that as we go into all the earth making disciples, He will be with us always, even to the end of the age (Mt 28:20). This means that there is never a place and never a time when God's presence will be lacking to accomplish His will in our lives. What confidence it gives us to know that

God is always with us and His strong hand to deliver is always near. In the words of Isaiah 41:10, *“Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”*

So church, never forget who you belong to:

- He is your Redeemer—His hand is mighty to save!
- You belong to Him and to none other—He is your identity and security!
- He is wise in his care for you—even when it requires the long way through the wilderness.
- He will not fail you as trust in Him—His faithfulness is proven across generations.
- His presence is guaranteed—He will never leave you or forsake you.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that you have come to be Emmanuel, God with us; to redeem us, to sanctify us, to lead us, and to prove Your faithfulness to us. There is no one better we could belong to or find our purpose and identity in. Bless us with a selfless abandon to You for our joy and Your glory.

**Annual Budget Meeting**