

## **Get Ready to Leave Egypt** **Exodus 12:14-32**

*“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.”*

*Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.*

*Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.*

*At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, “Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!”*

### **Introduction**

This is week three on the tenth and final plague - the death of all the firstborns in the land. And it is week three about the story of God's deliverance of his people through the sacrifice of a Passover Lamb.

The first week we saw that in this final plague God executed his judgment over Pharaoh and the Egyptians for their pride and unbelief and their idolatry and even for their murder. In verse 12, God made it clear that this was a judgment on the people of Egypt and their many gods. So this is a specific judgment for specific sin.

It was also a way for God to show his supreme power over Pharaoh and Egypt and the nations. When the plague narrative began Pharaoh said, *who is the Lord that I should listen to his voice and obey him* (Exodus 5:2). These plagues were God's answer to that question, and this final plague is God's definitive answer. Who is the Yahweh? He is Lord of heaven and earth.

Last week we focused in on the sacrifice itself. We saw why the lamb had to be without blemish because there could be no other reason to kill this lamb, other than it being a sacrifice. The lamb was a substitute for the first born. We saw that everyone living in Egypt was deserving of God's judgment because of their sin. But God, because he is gracious, allowed a lamb to die in the place of people deserving judgment.

When God's judgment fell in Egypt, there was death in every home. Either a first born died, or a lamb died. And this is because *the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord*.

We saw that this all a shadow of a far greater reality. We referenced John the Baptist and what he said when he saw Jesus coming. He said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world*".

That only makes in light of the Old Testament, and how God delivered his people and saved them from judgment via the death of a lamb. That was a mere shadow. Jesus is the substance. Jesus Christ is the lamb, and he died as a sacrifice on the cross in our place. He is our true Passover lamb.

Today, in our final Sunday focusing on these events, I want us to think mainly about the memorial that God instituted. God established a special feast or holiday so that they would remember

God's Salvation. It is called the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

My guess is that most of us have never heard a sermon on the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But don't think that makes this unimportant or irrelevant. Because it is not. This is relevant because it is loaded with rich truth for us – for Christians.

The big idea of this sermon – just to be upfront - is that when God delivers his people, he makes everything new. In Jesus Christ, we are a new creation. And it is therefore vital for us to leave behind what is behind and be who we are in Jesus Christ. You might not see how I arrive at that point from the Feast of Unleavened Bread, but I think you will before we are done today.

### **Why the Feast of Unleavened Bread**

Let's begin by thinking about the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The purpose of the having a feast at all is to remember something. In this case it is so that the Hebrews will remember God's grace to them in Egypt.

#### ***Our Short Memories***

We typically have very short memories. You probably know this to be true yourself. I know this to be true for me. You can go through something really hard in your life, and then see God wonderfully deliver you from that, and then not long after that you forget how gracious God has been to you and how trustworthy he has been for you.

Say your business – ranch or farm or whatever – has a tough year. Your losses are huge because of drought and hail and other weather issues and you have no idea how your business is going to make it or how you will feed your family. And that brings you to your knees in humble dependence on God and you pray your heart out for God to help. And then he does, and your business somehow makes it. And you praise God for his mercy and provision to you. You're left with your head spinning at God's undeserved kindness towards you and his provision for your family.

You'd think that would last a long time, and it should. But if it all happened again, say two or

three or five years later, you might act again as if God has forgotten you or is unable to help or that you yourself and a little bit a luck are you have to bank on. See how forgetful we can be?

We can see the forgetfulness of the Hebrew people in the wilderness. It won't be long before they run into a little trial and instead of remembering the God who brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and calling out to God and asking his help, they forget and complain.

In fact, they remember in a weird sort of way. They remember their time in Egypt with a strange kind of fondness. Look at Numbers 11:5:

*We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.*

That is the strange way our memories work. They made it sound almost like Egypt was a quaint summer resort. *We had all fish all we wanted, and melons and onions and leeks! Those were the days! We didn't even have to pay for it. We just had be slaves and make bricks all day long for no pay, and be beaten when we worked too slowly. Sure, they threw our babies into the Nile. But we had garlic!*

And that is how our minds and hearts often work. We forget God and remember other things in a weird way. Nostalgia for the past and a short memory for God's grace to us come together in way that is not helpful: we can remember the good ole days, while our forgetfulness of God's mercy and grace to us becomes rife.

That is why God instructed the Hebrews to memorialize the Passover by a feast. Each year, they would have a week to consider and remember how God had delivered them out of the hand of Pharaoh. God changed the Hebrew calendar so that this month would be the first month of the year, and they would begin each new year with a feast designed by God to help them remember God's grace to them. It is called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It would begin by the Passover meal, and end 7 days later when they could again eat leavened bread.

### ***Why No Leaven?***

So, how do we understand the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Or maybe a more specific question would be helpful to unpack this: why could they eat no leaven? I think there are a few layers to this, so let's start peeling a couple of those layers back.

#### ***Urgency***

One big reason is because there was urgency in God's redemptive dealings with Israel, especially on the night of the Passover. This was going to happen suddenly, and they needed to be ready to go. If you have ever made bread, you know that it takes time to rise. And in this case, they didn't have time. Deliverance would be imminent. They didn't have time to wait for their bread to rise. So they baked unleavened bread.

I didn't talk about it last week, even though we read the verse 11 - which tells us that they were to eat this Passover *with their belts fastened and their shoes on and their staffs in hand*. This wasn't a *let's-get-comfortable* kind of meal. Everything about the Passover spoke of urgency.

Thus, one reason for unleavened bread was to communicate the reality that this is an urgent matter. And I think there are some lessons there for us too.

My sense is that we feel like we have all the time in the world. I think we often live without the sort of urgency that reality requires. Especially the reality of the gospel and the Christian life and making this life count.

And yet the tone of the Bible is decidedly urgent. The writer of Hebrews said (Hebrews 3:15),  
*“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

I see that kind of urgency everywhere in the Scriptures. Today! And yet we live our lives as if we can get to it tomorrow. We have all the time in the world.

It helps being a pastor and having done end of life ministry – talking to people as they are

dying. Sadly, I have sat at the bedsides of people who are lamenting, not that they are dying per se, but that life is so short and that the end comes so suddenly. They wished they could go back and be more serious about life. To live with a greater sense of urgency. To not waste their lives.

The truth is, you don't know what tomorrow holds. You don't have time to let the bread rise. In the memorial of this event – the Passover - I see a reminder to the people of God to live with intentionality today; to feel the urgency.

### ***Because All Things Are Made New***

But I think that is only a minor point about the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Because of way verse 17 ties the Unleavened Bread to the Passover, and – even more significantly – because of the way the New Testament uses this story (which I will reference in a bit), I am certain that there is a bigger point made here. There is a reminder here of a huge spiritual truth, relevant to every genuine Christian. Namely, that God, in delivering his people, makes all things new and we should leave the old behind.

### ***How They Baked Bread***

To understand this you have to know something about the baking process of that day. They didn't have yeast as we know it. I don't bake much, but my wife does. And, on occasion, she has set out to make fluffy bread and has texted me and asked me to run to Safeway and pick up a little packet of yeast so that she could make the bread could rise. The Hebrews in Egypt couldn't do that. They didn't have phones. Or Safeways. Or little yeast packets.

But they had a method for making bread rise which was called leaven, and it is bit different than yeast as we know it. Basically, one makes a loaf of bread with the ingredients available: flour, oil, salt, etc., but because it wouldn't have a rising agent, the end product would look something like a flour tortilla or a flat cracker, or something like that, depending on how they baked it. It would not rise.

Before baking they would cut a little piece of dough and put it in a warm, moist place in their house and let it ferment for a week. That piece was called leaven. When it came time to make next

week's batch, they would mix that fermented piece of leavened dough into the new batch, and it would cause the bread to rise.

After a couple of batches, you have a powerful rising agent, and your bread would get better and better.

If you think of it, that means that each loaf would have some of all the previous loaves in it. The fluffy bread you eat today would have been influenced by all the loaves since the leaven process began.

### ***The Feast & the Passover***

So with that in mind, let's think about how this connects with Passover. Everything begins with an innocent lamb dying so that the judgment of God passes from you and so that you can be delivered. And then you bake unleavened bread and eat the lamb with that bread and with bitter herbs (which I think reminded them of the bitterness of slavery). And then you go 7 days with no leaven. Just flat bread.

The bread you eat going forward from God's deliverance through the Lamb is not derived from what came before. Everything is new. You are delivered, and your new life is not pinned to the old.

When you put it together, what you see is a picture of the gospel and your new life in Christ. The Lamb has died in your place. And now, in Christ, you are new - completely new. We now have a responsibility to bake bread that intentionally leaves out what came before. That is the point.

And it is a point for Christians, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

If you are in Jesus, you are not who you were before, do you understand that? He has saved you by the blood of the Lamb and through him he has made you new. The old is passed. The new has come.

The gospel doesn't just add new ingredients to an old recipe. It starts all over again, with all new ingredients. The gospel is about that transformation that happens the moment one is made alive by the blood of Jesus Christ – and continues as he grows more and more into Christ's likeness.

### *Is All That in Exodus 12?*

You could be wondering how I can make such a connection from Exodus 12. I mean, yes, it seems to fit, but can I just draw that line from Exodus 12 to 2 Corinthians 5:17 and declare to you that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is mainly about your new life in Christ?

Yes, I can. Because that is how the Apostle Paul unpacked for us the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. Paul said:

*Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

Paul, in urging Christians to throw off the sin of our old life – sins like malice and evil - appeals to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Just as the bread was made completely new when the lamb was sacrificed, so your life – on this side of our Passover Lamb being sacrificed for us on Calvary - needs to have new ingredients and we need to intentionally leave the old ingredients back in Egypt.

### **Conclusion**

That is the big take away here. Christians, we have to stop making our bread with the same old stuff. If you are in Christ, you should not live like you have always lived. You should not be driven by the same selfish impulses – like malice and evil and selfishness and lust and so on. That might have been you before, but it is not you now, if you are in Christ. If you're in Christ everything has changed.

So what's the leaven you need to clean out of your house today? You can ask God to help you see it and give you the power to root it out. You are free from the old.

Another takeaway here is that we should eat this feast with our belts fastened, and our shoes on, and our staffs in hand. We can't take it easy. We simply don't have time. There is sin to address, there are Christians that we need to love and disciple. There are people and people groups who need the gospel. We have such a short time to glorify Christ with our lives!

We can't approach the Christian life with casualness or laziness, or as if we have forever to get to it. We have today.

Think of it. Every one of us in this room will lay our heads down on our beds tonight and we will have either wasted this day, or we will have eaten the feast. And that is how it is every day. Do you fear wasting your life? I hope you do. You should. It is a real and present danger. The key to not wasting your life, is not wasting today.

Friends, Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us. He died on the cross, was buried and on the third day rose again. Everything is new. By faith alone in Christ alone, let us leave Egypt, and its things – its leaven - behind forever and live forever – live today - for the glory of the risen Christ.