

Christianityworks
The Passover Blessing
055-3
Just Let it Sink

When we throw our anchors down deep into God and who He is and what He has done for us, no matter what storm blows in, we can live our lives on that solid, solid ground.

Freedom for the Taking

Imagine that you are one of the people in slavery on this earth today – one of the between twenty and one hundred million people estimated to be living as slaves. And you are living in this yoke of slavery without the normal freedoms that people take for granted and one day someone comes to set you free – to take you out of your land of slavery to that place that ... well a place that is so different.

On the one hand your heart would leap for joy, wouldn't it? But when they outline this crazy escape plan they have for you, well, doubt and fear and uncertainty would be factors, wouldn't they? Wouldn't this play on your mind? It would for me! And we could be seriously tempted to knock back the offer – perhaps the certainty of where I am at the moment is much better than, well, the unknown. Better than the freedom that I don't understand – better than the risk of an uncertain freedom.

It sounds strange but that in fact, is how it is for so many people. Better the devil you know than the one you don't and so we just stay where we are. Well, what, may you ask, does this have to do with the whole Easter thing and why are we still talking about Easter anyway? Easter has been over for weeks.

Over these last few weeks we have been looking at Easter and I guess by now most of us have brushed past. But Easter isn't for brushing past – it's for savouring. It makes a difference. We have seen over these last few weeks on the programme what the Passover is all about.

In 1270AD Israel was in slavery in Egypt and Moses was called by God and God sent plagues on the Egyptians and the last plague was the death of the first born. And the Israelites were commanded to take a lamb and kill it and paint the blood on their doorposts and so, when this plague of killing the first

born went right across Egypt, God 'passed over' the Israelites and they weren't punished. Instead, this miracle set them free.

It was a double sided miracle - to the Egyptians it was a curse and to the Israelites it was a blessing. And the parallel in the New Testament is that at Easter, the Lamb of God, Jesus....Jesus' blood is poured out on the cross. I mean, the whole Easter thing happened during the Passover celebration - there was a reason for that. God was painting a clear link between Easter and this Passover. And the thing that causes the punishment to 'pass over' us is our faith in Jesus.

See, it's still a double sided coin today. It depends on which side you are on as to how it works - whether it's a plague or a blessing - a punishment or a release. That much is up to us. But it's easy for us to skip over this Passover story really quickly. I mean, these people in Egypt, in 1270BC - they had been slaves for four hundred and something years. That's about eighteen generations - it's a long time.

And what's been happening as God's been bringing these plagues on Egypt, is that Pharaoh has steadily been making things worse for them - increasing their workload and reducing their food in response to God's plagues on Egypt.

You wonder how they felt when Moses came and said to them, 'This last plague...this is the one - with this one Pharaoh is going to let us go. And we saw that last week - the instructions they received from God. You can read it for yourself - if you have a Bible, open it at Exodus chapter 12. This is what it says:

"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the Land of Egypt, "Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family - a lamb for each household. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.

This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the Land of Egypt."

Now here's the part that I want to focus on right now because it speaks volumes to us today. It's the manner in which they should eat the Passover – that final meal, the last supper before God set them free. Exodus chapter 12, verse 11 says this: *"This is how you shall eat it – your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, your staff in your hand. You shall eat it hurriedly for it is the Passover of the Lord."* Why? So that they would be ready!

God was saying 'Don't lounge around. Gird up your loins (and what that means is that men wore tunics and when you are running and fleeing and walking, it's easy to trip over your tunic so what you did was, to prepare for that you would gird up your loins – you'd tuck the long tunic into your belt so that you could move quickly.) Gird up your loins, put on your sandals, eat in a hurry, be ready because God is about to set you free. If you just laze around and make yourself comfortable in this dung heap of slavery, you are going to miss out.

See, here it is – Easter – that's what Easter is about. And so many of us are just kind of sitting around and we are looking back at Easter and we are lounging around and we think, 'Ah well, we had a break and we ate some chocolate...' Listen to me! The Passover was about setting people free from slavery and that's exactly what Easter is about, here and now.

When we put our trust in the Lamb of God; this Jesus who gave up His life so that the punishment that we richly deserve, would 'pass over' us when we put our faith in Him, then we are set free from our slavery to sin. Just like the Israelites were in 1270BC – just like everybody has been since Jesus was nailed to the cross – everybody who puts their faith in Him. We are set free from the consequences of our mistakes.

So, let me ask you something – are you ready? Are your sandals on your feet? Are you ready for this new freedom? See, we can even be prepared to believe in Jesus but not be ready for the journey to freedom. It's a strange journey. It's not just sitting on the couch waiting for God to do it all – it involves us – and there are going to be battles along the way. There are going to be things in our lives that we have to overcome – hurdles to jump, mountains to climb. 'Oh, yea, I want to believe in Jesus but, aw, I don't want it to cause me to work up a sweat or have to change my lifestyle or anything.'

Listen to me! Israel had to get up and walk to freedom – God opened the door – God did the miracle but they had to go and take the Promised Land. And it's the same with Jesus ... it's the same with Easter. God has done everything ... everything that's necessary for our forgiveness and our

freedom and our new life – everything – it’s all done by Jesus on the cross. But now ... now we have to get up and take it and believe it and live it with our lives.

Let me ask you something – are you ready? Are you prepared to go? Are you prepared to live this new freedom? If those Israelites had decided to stay there in Egypt instead of going, God’s miracles would have meant precisely nothing to them. Do you get it?

But What Does it All Mean?

Here we are – we have rushed by Easter – the greatest event on the calendar; the day when God made provision for you and me by paying the price of our mistakes and our failures and - can I use this word – our sin and we munched on some chocolate and maybe we went to church and then promptly we moved on, back to the same old grind. But what did it all mean? Is there anything in it for me today, in the middle of the pressures of my life?

Over the last few weeks and again today on the programme we have been looking at the event of thirteen hundred years before that first Easter. And over the course of this series, we have been looking more closely at the thing in which Easter finds its roots. Not so much Easter itself, but the precursor to Easter – the Passover. And you know, at that very first Passover, God commands Israel to celebrate the Passover festival every year – kind of like we celebrate Easter. In fact, what was going on, on that very first Easter, was the celebration of the Passover.

Now have another listen to this because it speaks right into our lives, here and now. God tells them what to do at the Passover – you know, kill the lamb, paint the blood on your doorposts – we’ve looked at all that sort of stuff and then He says:

“You shall observe this right as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. When you come to the land that the Lord your God will give you, as He has promised, you shall keep this observance. And when your children ask you, “What do you mean by this observance?” you shall say, “It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for He ‘passed over’ the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when He struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.” And the people bowed down and they worshipped.

The Israelites went and did just as the Lord and commanded Moses and Aaron. At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn of the Land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock."

See, this was an amazing miracle – this miracle that God struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians and through that, Israel, who were in slavery in Egypt, were set free and they began the exodus over forty years, to the Promised Land. And so each year Israel celebrated the Passover with a meal – the Passover meal. That’s what Jesus and His disciples were doing at the Last Supper – they were celebrating the Passover meal. And it was a week-long festival called the Festival of the Unleavened Bread.

They stopped doing it for a few years when they strayed away from God but, by and large, from that first Passover to this very day, Israelites have celebrated the Passover meal. They eat particular foods – lamb and unleavened bread and certain herbs and they drink four glasses of wine during the meal – it’s kind of a real liturgy, if you like, to the meal. And part of the tradition of the Passover meal, is for the youngest child to ask his or her father four questions. And the gist of those questions is this: ‘Dad, why is this night different from all other nights? Each of the four questions asks about one of the four symbols used in the Passover celebration. ‘Dad, why are we doing this particular thing on this night?’

‘So why is the Passover different from all the other times of the year?’ the younger child will ask and only the father may answer. And his job is to tell the story...the story of how God brought Israel out of years of slavery in Egypt into a journey to freedom, through the plagues that God sent on Egypt through Moses and Aaron. Each year the children are told the story so that it becomes a part of them.

And as Jesus sat at that Last Supper – the Passover celebration – He too told a story. He told the story of the new promise for God’s chosen people; for anyone who would believe in Him. And He called it a New Covenant – He told of a new Passover Lamb, a new setting free of God’s people from the slavery of their sin into a journey of freedom.

"On the night He was betrayed, Jesus took a loaf of bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it. And He said, "This is My body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me. In the same way, He took the cup, also after the supper, saying, "This is the cup of the New Covenant in My blood. Do this as often as you drink of it in

remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again."

And so Jesus at this Passover meal - the Last Supper as we have come to know it - explained what the Passover was all about. Rooted deep in Israel's history, these miracles that set them free from slavery - Jesus is saying, 'when you remember Me, when you believe in Me - it's about freedom from slavery, it's about One man, Jesus dying for the many and setting the rest of us free. "*The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*"

See, so many people travel through life with a sense of: well today, we wouldn't call it guilt - today we might have some other labels - maybe low self esteem, maybe inadequacy, maybe the sense that we haven't arrived; the sense that something is not quite right - that perhaps something is missing.

I love this old Hebrew tradition of the Passover. As the family sits down to the meal that remembers the very first Passover meal, eaten hurriedly, before God lifted His people up and set them free from generations of slavery. The youngest child asks, 'Dad, why is tonight different? What is it that makes this thing special? Why do we eat this and not that? Why do we recline at the table rather than sit up straight? Dad, what's this ritual about? Why are we doing this?

"Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me - don't stop them, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, will never enter it."

Can we skate through Easter and not even give it a second thought? Sure, course we can but if we do that we miss the whole point. The point of Easter is freedom from slavery - the slavery we have to our own selfishness and sin and the rejection of God. And what slave doesn't want to be free? What slave doesn't yearn for a life of freedom?

Is today the day to ask that question? 'Dad, I have been through Easter so many times, what makes this one different? What can You do in my life through this Easter message, Dad?'

A Time to Remember

One of the terms you hear bandied around a lot these days by sociologists - people who study our culture and how we live - is 'short-termism' (maybe

it's two words, I don't know) and what they are talking about is the fact that we are all so focussed on spending up big on the credit card and paying off the debt, that we have stopped looking longer term – we have stopped thinking about the future and dreaming and planning and hoping. We are all walking around looking at our feet because the load that we are carrying is so heavy that we are stooped over.

And when you think about it, that's an incredibly sad way to live. We work hard all week just to eke out a living, to pay for the mortgage, to put food on the table and the furthest ahead we seem to be able to think is the weekend, so that we can flop on the couch, exhausted.

So 'short-termism' is about the fact that we always focus on the short term but as well as stopping us from looking forward, it stops us from looking back. And whilst none of us should be living in the past, it turns out, the past has a lot to do with us feeling secure about the present and having hope for the future.

Think about it. We are made up of two things: our DNA – who we naturally are and our experiences. You take two identical twins – exactly the same DNA fingerprint – you put one in a loving home and the other in a horrid home and they are going to grow up to be two profoundly different people. Who we naturally are is shaped by our environment – our experiences: good, bad, positive, negative and that makes us who we are.

The problem with short-termism is we forget the things our experiences taught us. In the olden days, which is what I used to call my parents' experience and it's what my kids now call my experience – back in the olden days people were interested in a whole bunch of things from the past ... their ethnic heritage, their family, where they had come from, the traditions of their community and their family. It's not true anymore because we are into short-termism.

I was talking to a father recently - a man my age with three adult children - and he's been trying to get some family traditions going amongst this extended family. Trying to establish some family roots for his kids and their children but his adult children, they're resisting. That's because the culture has shifted to be short term – buying the next thing, making it through to the weekend.

What's all that got to do with this Easter thing we have been looking at? Turns out – an awful lot! We have been looking over these last few weeks at the whole Easter thing through the incredibly rich symbolism of the Jewish

Passover festival because Jesus was crucified during the Passover festival and what He was doing, He very closely tied to that celebration.

Now we have talked a lot about the Passover so I'm not going to go there again. But God commanded - as we saw earlier - God commanded the Israelites that every year they were to celebrate the Passover - they were to remember. They were to remember the ten plagues - the last one - how God's people were 'passed over' from that last plague, how they were set free from slavery, how they began their journey in the wilderness for forty years to the Promised Land.

God wanted them to remember. And over and over again you look through the Old Testament God reminds them of what He did for them. For instance, if you've got a Bible, open it at Numbers chapter 15, verses 40 and 41. He says: *"So you shall remember and do all My commandments and you shall be holy to your God for I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord your God."*

Every year Israel celebrates the Passover - every year, right through to the present time - Jewish people celebrate the Passover. They remember! Their children - the youngest child sits at the table and asks Dad: 'Dad, why is this different,' and Dad tells the story.

This is so important because when we shape our lives around the short term things that pass away, we are like a cork bobbing around in an ocean. We are like a cork being tossed to and fro by every which way. We have no roots, we have nothing solid but when we throw our anchors down deep into God and who He is and what He has done for us, then we find a life that, no matter what storm blows in, we can live our lives on that solid, solid ground.

We rely on the good things that God has done in the past to know that we can get through the present and get on with the future. And at the Passover celebration; that final supper in that upper room with His disciples, as Jesus broke the bread and poured the wine He said, *"Do these things in remembrance of Me."*

Easter is a time to remember. It's not a time to rush through. It's not a time to forget. Easter is a time to remember.

I don't know! You know, I make mistakes every day of the week and sometimes those mistakes get you down, don't they? Sometimes you look at yourself and you think, 'Gaa, I'm just no good at this. I could never be

acceptable to God (like that young man I was talking about before on the programme).’

You know, until you remember that Jesus hung on that cross for you and me. Until you remember that Jesus paid the price and not only that, He rose again to give us a new life. I wonder, as you just stop and think and survey the landscape of your life – the good things, the stressful things, the uncertain things – whatever, good and bad – and you consider how you are dealing with that – let me ask you this: what if you lived your life ... lived it in a way that it’s deeply anchored in the rich memory of the amazing sacrifice that Jesus made on that cross during the Passover celebration?

What if, instead of worrying about, ‘What am I going to buy next on my credit card, what am I going to do, what’s the next experience?’ See, that’s escapism from the realities of life. What if, instead of that, we just paused and stopped and with the eyes of our souls gazed up at the cross of Christ and saw our Saviour hanging there – He who died for us? And what if that was the greatest reality of our lives?

See, short-termism breezes through Easter without a second thought but Easter is a time to remember because that memory can profoundly change our present and our future.