
Feast and Follow

Exodus 13:1-22

Introduction How important is your identity?

Watching the crowds in Germany and picking out the Americans.

Having an American passport traveling in Europe.

People having their identity stolen.

What does it mean to be a redeemed people?

Deliberation: Remember Redemption's Purpose (v.1-10)

Further instructions for the Passover are given with a view to personal and corporate deliberation and remembering redemption's purpose.

By the Consecration of the Firstborn (v.1-2)

The LORD said to Moses, ² "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine."

In the ongoing unfolding of the meaning of the Passover, Moses is given a new requirement that sheds light on the judgment of the firstborn. By the consecration of the firstborn, God lays claim as the LORD to all the firstborn whether children or beasts. He is the King and Lord over all the universe, but especially over His people. He requires the first born and the first fruits. This is His right. In responding to this requirement by God, the Israelites are acknowledging His sovereign rule over them.

This requires an intentional act by the people. There is no passive response to this command. Upon the first being born in their families and among their livestock they must respond by an act of deliberate consecration. It must be set aside for God's exclusive use. It will be His alone. At this point in the life of Israel, they do not yet know what all that entails. They only know now that there is some connection between the judgment of God on the first born while in Egypt and their being required to give up their first born to God.

This is part of the beginning of the giving of the Mosaic Law. God commands Moses as to what He requires. Moses in turn informs and instructs the people. The believing Israelite hears God's Word through Moses' word and responds with faith by believing God in an obeying way. Later, due to their unbelief and sin, God codifies the Law into the massive Old Covenant structure we know as the Mosaic Law for Israel.

The firstborn point us to David, as the firstborn king, the archetype of Christ. Listen to the words of Psalm 89:20-29;

I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him,
 so that my hand shall be established with him; my arm also shall strengthen him.
 The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him.
 I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.
 My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,
 and in my name shall his horn be exalted.
 I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.
 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'
 And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.
 My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.
 I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens. [ESV]

The first born are consecrated to the Lord as an Old Covenant picture pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ in a different way as well. He ever is the 2nd person of the Godhead. He ever is God, deity in His essence. He is also God's first born son. He has always been generated by the Father. There has never been a time that He has not existed. And, the Father eternally generates the son. Further, into creation Jesus is born as a fully human being, born of a woman, born under the Law. He was begotten by the Father through the Holy Spirit, and therefore is God's own first born (Luke 2:7). Thus Hebrews 1:6 quoting the Old Testament says, *"And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, Let all God's angels worship him."* He was God's own first born, consecrated as holy to God from eternity past, in the obedient act of his parents and finally in His own fulfilling of all righteousness through baptism.

Colossians tells us that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15) as the image of the invisible God. He is also the head of the body, the church for He is the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18). Why this emphasis on being the firstborn? So that He might have the preeminence in everything.

Finally, we are told that Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren. Therefore, we are gathered in worship and prayer "to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23). The last book of the Bible refers to Jesus as one from whom grace and peace come as the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings on the earth.

So this celebration pointed to the purpose of God to bring about the full and final redemption of His people through His own firstborn. When we come to the Lord's Table, let us remember Christ, the firstborn of God so that we focus on Him.

With the Celebration of Redemption (v.3-5)

³ Then Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the LORD brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. ⁴ Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. ⁵ And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month.

Redemption's purpose is also recalled through the celebration of the Passover. The key here is to "remember this day," the day of their redemption from slavery. The day that begins the new year, the new age. The day they left Egypt and were set free to worship and serve God. This celebration is not just a festival; it is to remember what God has done and remind each other of the very great mercies of God.

Here is the first mention of the salvation by God being an act of His mighty arm. His strong hand has wrought this salvation. In an ironic twist, God had told Moses in Exodus 6:1 that Pharaoh would send God's people out with a strong hand. But now God's strong hand has delivered His people. This deliverance is celebrated as exhibiting the steadfast love of God in Psalm 136:12. It is brought forward as a reminder to the people of God's saving mercies before the captivity (Jeremiah 32:21) and upon their return to the land (Nehemiah 1:10).

It will be celebrated with unleavened bread on the day the Lord required. And it was to be celebrated once they were brought into the Promised Land. That Promised Land would be occupied by enemies. That Promised Land is a bountiful place. As God fulfills all that He has promised in a bountiful land and in the midst of conquest, they were to celebrate regularly the redeeming work of God.

So, this celebration pointed to the purpose of God to bring His people through His redemption to the fulfillment of all His promises. When we come to the Lord's Table next Sunday, let us remember that God has redeemed us through His own strong hand against His first born Son in wrath and with a mighty arm to deliver us from our sin.

For the Centrality of Holiness (v.6-7)

⁶ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. ⁷ Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory.

Redemption's purpose is highlighted through the repeated commands to eat unleavened bread at the celebration meal. In the instructions for the meal, this is the most repeated and most emphasized part of the meal. Why is this so?

Leaven is generally seen in the Bible as representing the pernicious and pervasive presence of sin. In celebrating the Passover, leaven was to be removed from the house, not used in any cooking for the whole celebration week and the bread eaten on the final feast was to be unleavened. This final feast at the end of the week was the Feast of Unleavened bread.

God's people were being taught the centrality of holiness. At the highest celebration of God's deliverance from Egypt, they were constantly reminded to be pure. Unleavened bread was the symbol. Jesus' perfect holy life is the reality. Our own holy lives are the downstream flow of God's own holiness in Christ. We reflect in our unleavened lives the unleavened life of Christ.

God's people are also being taught through the hard work to clean out the leaven, that holiness is not only our privilege, but also our responsibility. We are passive recipients of Christ's holiness put to our account. And we are active participants in living out the holiness that has been put to our account.

Just so there is no confusion in what I am saying. We are fully and finally accepted holy before God only on the holiness of Christ imputed or put to our account apart from us. Our holiness is purely derived and is no grounds for justification or having a right standing before God. But all of us who have been given the unleavened holiness of Christ will seek to celebrate that redemptive gift by purging out the remnants of the leaven of sin in our lives.

So, this celebration pointed to the purpose of God to redeem a holy people for Himself. When we come to the Lord's Table next Sunday, let us remember that we have been saved to be a holy people, to live unleavened lives.

In the Call to Instruction

(v.8-10)

⁸ You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' ⁹ And 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 has brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰ You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year.

Redemption's purpose is to be communicated through the call to instruction. The primary responsibility for that instruction lies with the father. At each Passover celebration and Feast of Unleavened Bread, a catechism, a question and answer dialog took place the children. Thus the children begin to learn the meaning and importance of their deliverance from Egypt, even when those who were first delivered are long in the grave.

The importance of teaching about God's redemptive work is shown in that it was to be an integral part of all of life. The point in the second sentence is not to literally write the redemptive story on their hands, or to wear some box strapped to their forehead or talk only with spiritual talk. This is where the Pharisees ended up. In avoiding the heart implications of this command, they focused entirely on the externals with the effect that their very literal doing of this eventually damned them.

What God intended here is unfolded all through the Mosaic Law. The Word of God is to be deeply ingrained into one's own life. Then, in every area of life, it is to be taught to our children. The teaching of the Bible to our children is to arise from our working hard to live it, to learn it and to teach it. The Word is to be incorporated into lives and living. Then it is to be instructed as lessons.

The Passover Celebration was an important teaching moment. A simple rite was being done. It should raise questions at first. Once the rite is familiar, teaching must be done in order to keep it fresh before the observer and to deepen its meaning to the believer.

So, this celebration points to the purpose of God to instruct His people in their households by their parents about the greatness and the grandness of God's redemptive work.

Dedication: Acknowledge Redemption's Price (v.11-16)

Being God's redeemed people means we must acknowledge redemption's price. Israel was vividly taught what it cost through the firstborn's dedication and redemption.

Through Acts of Obedience (v.11-13)

¹¹ "When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, ¹² you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD'S. ¹³ Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.

In these two sentences, the rhythm of life will become a constant and regular reminder of the cost of deliverance from Egypt and the price of redemption. Every first child in a family was required by the Lord for Himself. They were to be consecrated, set aside wholly unto Him. The word here is the root for sanctify, or set apart. The first born were to be marked out and set apart. They were to be regarded, not as the family's, but as the Lord's. Thus, when Hannah bore Samuel the prophet much later in Israel's history, she is not just dedicating him to the Lord. She is setting him apart and giving him up. She is recognizing the Lord's claim on him.

Now, I am avoiding the word "dedication" here intentionally. We sometimes talk about dedicating our children to the Lord. Some churches will dedicate a building to the Lord. In many Christian circles there is talk about dedicating ourselves, being dedicated to the Lord or rededicating our lives to the Lord. Over the years, reading the Bible carefully has led me to the firm conclusion that Biblical dedication is a one-time act that occurs at salvation. I know that this vocabulary is common among Christians. The problem is that what the Bible means and what we mean are two different things. The Bible's word is to consecrate or to sanctify. It requires the total giving away or pouring out as set aside wholly for God. In the New Covenant, *this is already done in every way possible at our salvation*. We cannot do it again. We cannot redo it over. We cannot dedicate our unsaved children. This is why (with some hesitation for me) we call what we do "parent dedication". In other words, this is one of the great changes from the Old to the New Covenants. We have, once for all, been sanctified, consecrated, dedicated to Christ. That being true, then our obligation according to Romans 12:1-2 is to present these bodies as living sacrifices given the mercies of God. You have been sanctified, dedicated, consecrated. Now, since that is true, start living sacrificially.

All the first born males of the livestock were also to be consecrated to the Lord. The Lord has made His claim on them as well. They were to be gladly given up to the Lord. Later, when the Levitical system is fully given and codified, this act of sanctification or consecration meant either that the animal was sacrificed or that it was given to the priests as a part of their tithe.

In a startling sentence, God's people learn that a lamb may be substituted for the firstborn donkey and the firstborn son. It almost seems that the donkey and the son are being placed in the same class. Probably what is meant here is illustrative. If the Israelite would not consecrate a beast, namely the donkey, then a life had to be given through the sacrificed lamb or the beast's neck was to be broken. If this was required of beasts, then even much more it was required of sons. So, if an Israelite disobeyed, something died. If not the donkey, then a lamb died. If a son was not dedicated, a lamb died. Death is the penalty for disobedience. All those who are not dedicated and redeemed will one day die. This is the wages, the price of sin.

⁶ "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:7)

So, redemption comes at a great price. It will cost them their firstborn. And it will cost them obedience. In both of these, the redeeming work of Christ is pictured. He, God's firstborn, gave up His life in order to redeem us. He paid the purchase price, not just the pass over price. That sacrifice of Himself for His people was a supreme act of obedience. He did the Father's will at every point. He gave up His life. He bared His throat as the sacrificial lamb. The Father's wrath crushed Him. And that substitutionary sacrifice satisfied God. So Christ is the reality of both the consecrated firstborn and the obedient Israelite. But till He came, lambs were offered in the place of the firstborn.

Through Words of Instruction

(v.14-16)

¹⁴ And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ¹⁵ For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' ¹⁶ It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

Imagine the teaching moment. The father takes his son out to see the birth of beasts among his livestock. Here is a lamb, a goat, a calf that is the first born of that mother. He takes it out and sacrifices it. As his children stand by, he turns to them and says, "Do you understand why I do this? Do you understand why every firstborn must be sacrificed?" And then he explains. He reminds them of the judgments of God in Egypt. He tells of God's delivering work from Egypt. He tells them about God's accepting a lamb instead of first born sons.

Now, this prompts the next question from the oldest son, “So what about me? Was I supposed to be sacrificed like Isaac? I am a firstborn. Why was I not killed as well?” The answer is at the end of verse 15. For his firstborn son, he has offered a lamb instead. God requires the consecration of his eldest. But God graciously provided that He would accept the sacrifice of a lamb instead. So Israelite children are taught that an innocent lamb was sacrificed for the eldest, the firstborn.

Through these words of instruction, reminding them of God’s saving acts in history and what those acts mean, God through family fathers teaches His people what the word “redeem” means. It means to purchase through death the freedom of another. This is the consistent language of the Bible. Let us be faithful to the content God gives to His words for our salvation. We are redeemed. We are bought. We are God’s. He owns us. We owed Him a debt we could not pay. He paid a debt He did not owe. We have our unpayable debt settled. We are released therefore from the slavery in the realm of sin and Law. We are set free as sons in the realm of righteousness and grace. Praise God.

Direction: Become Redemption’s People (v.17-22)

Israel was to follow God’s leading from place to place. This was an act of submission as they were to follow God without question. When they moved with God, they remained in His Presence. If they did not go with God, His Presence moved on without them. Tenting, dwelling in the midst of God’s presence is how they were to become redemption’s people.

Under God’s Wise Providences (v.17-18)

¹⁷ When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.” ¹⁸ But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.

They dwelled with God under His wise providences. Submission meant accepting with gladness even a circuitous route. I am sure there are many in the camp who would have taken a more direct route. Probably many of them questioned the wisdom of trekking all this way around. Nevertheless, God knows what is best. He plans for them to have time to “jell” as a people, to become one together before they have to face war. The long trek was the best way around. It gave them time to become a people who knew how to function together.

But this does not mean that Israel was foolish. They know that both the Egyptians behind them and the nations in front of them would do all they could to prevent their march. So, as God leads them around they go prepared for battle. They submit to God’s clear providence and they prepare for whatever that providence may lead them into.

By God's Fulfilled Promises**(v.19)**

¹⁹ Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here."

Imagine with me this scene. The long, ten mile train of two million of God's people heads out of Egypt towards the first encampment outside the borders of Egypt. They are led by Aaron and Moses with their respective rods held high. But there also is the sarcophagus with Joseph's bones in it. Here is the fulfillment of the promises of God 430 years ago. The Jews are headed out of slavery towards their homeland. With them go the bones of Joseph.

What a graphic demonstration of the faithfulness of God. He will do what He has promised. Yes, it may be a long time before the fulfillment. But God will not fail. His promises are never broken. His timing is utterly perfect. His providences are flawless. So the people of God hearing the promises of God and seeing the bones of Joseph headed up are encouraged and enabled to hold fast. This narrative in the book of Exodus will encourage them through the forty years of wandering. And for us, it reminds us that we do not grieve as the world does over the death of believers. There will come a day when all of God's promises, every one of them, will be fulfilled when all of God's people arrive at home, not with dead bones, but with glorified bodies. Take hope from Joseph's bones that God is faithful.

With God's Guiding Presence**(v.20-22)**

²⁰ And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.

²¹ And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ²² The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

Israel will become a redemptive people by the divine presence with them and leading out before them. They are God's people because of God's presence. As they move about in their journey towards the Promised Land, the presence of God will lead them. When they follow God, they are in His presence and His presence is in their midst.

Here is the first mention of the glory of God in the pillar of fire and cloud. The very presence of God is being made visible. He is displaying His presence among His people. His presence is guiding them on the journey. Day by day, week by week, the people of God could look at the pillar of cloud that glowed like fire at night and say, "There is our God. He is with us. We are in His presence. He is leading us."

One phrase leaps out at me. Not only was this fiery column of cloud and light to guide them. But it also was to illuminate them and their path. This theme runs through the Bible. God being a light to our path and a lamp to our feet is not just our having God's Word as a lantern, torch or flashlight. Our path being illuminated by God means that we have the presence of God as well. What a comfort this is.

Conclusion We need to grow in our walk with God by understanding and applying more and more what it means to be God's redeemed people.

We must be transformed by the purpose of our redemption. God has saved us to be a holy people who serve Him with unleavened lives. His grace and mercy does not leave us in our sin, but delivers it from it so that we can be pleasing to Him. Remembering this great purpose of our redemption has a powerfully transforming affect on our lives.

We must be gripped by the price of our redemption. As we move through Exodus and through the whole Bible, allow the awful cost of sin to be worked deep into your soul. Yes, we see the devastating effects of sin in creation and in creatures. We see the desperate plight of people. We see the destructive power of sin's enslavement in ravaged and ruined lives. But that is not where the price of sin is most graphically displayed. No, the cross, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most vivid exhibition of the awful cost of our sin. The only begotten, dearly beloved, first born son of God, His innocent precious lamb was there slaughtered for the sins of His people. O, what a treasure our redemption is! How needful grace is to see it. How necessary gratitude is once we have experienced it.

We must be growing into being who our redemption says we are. God no longer defines nor directs His people by visible manifestations of pillars of fiery clouds. His shining glory was placed in a human body and walked among us. He tabernacled with us and we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth. But now, the presence of God indwells His people, individually and corporately. The life and love of God is flowing through our inner man, our hearts, by the Holy Spirit. Through the union of the Word of God and the Spirit of God, we are indwelt by God. We are the tabernacle of God by the Spirit. We must live out these truths as our identity. This is who we are and what God declares to be true *even though we cannot sense them in our physical selves*. But we believe them by faith and desire to live them out so that our behavior, our choices and emotions are transformed by our identity.

Next Sunday evening we will be gathering at the Lord's Table. We will be celebrating the memorial feast of the New Covenant as the gathered people of God. May we gather with a true sense of our identity in Christ, the great price that was paid and the holy purpose of Jesus' redeeming work. Prepare this week. Repent of your sin. Confess them before God. Repair and restore your relationships. Come ready to share the gathered life of God's people. Be ready to feast and follow.

