

The Exodus
Exodus 12:29-42
Lebanon PCA, Rev. Lane Keister

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Imagine yourself being an Egyptian parent. You have heard the prediction of the last plague. You saw all the previous plagues. Now you fear for your child's life. Would you have even gone to sleep at all? Would you not be continually checking your oldest child's life? If you were the oldest child in your parent's house, would you not have been terrified for your own life? Now imagine you were an Israelite, safe in your own house, and yet half fearing that the blood on the doorposts might not be enough. You also might be checking your own child's life, or, if you were the child, you might be a little nervous. Well, here the moment of truth has come at last. The Lord executes judgment on Egypt, and brings out His people from the land of Egypt. This is a wonderful picture for us of what salvation looks like. It is also a picture of judgment pointing to the final day of judgment.

It is rather amazing that the description of the death of the firstborn is so short. We've been waiting and waiting and waiting for this moment. Then, when it finally comes, only a few short verses describe the terrible last plague. Moses wants us to use our imagination to hear the cries of the families of Egypt, and to feel the dread in Pharaoh's own heart as he realizes once and for all that he is not God. As we have seen all throughout the plagues, each plague was an attack on one of Egypt's gods. This final plague is directed at the worst god of them all: self. For Pharaoh and the Egyptians believed that Pharaoh was immortal through his firstborn son. So, to attack Pharaoh's firstborn son was to attack Pharaoh himself and to show him that he was not immortal as he thought he was. It is always complete devastation in a person's heart when he realizes that he is not god, that he is not the captain of his soul and the master of his own fate, and that he does not have an unconquerable soul.

The other reason why God inflicted this plague on the Egyptians was in retribution for the Egyptians killing the sons of the Israelites in the Nile river. Since the Egyptians killed the Israelites' firstborn, God now takes the lives of the Egyptians' firstborn. The punishment fits the crime. God is always just.

This final plague finally breaks the will of Pharaoh. He and his people finally realize that if they do not surrender unconditionally, then they will all be dead. Indeed, that is precisely what the Egyptians say when they plead with the Israelites to leave immediately. Literally, they say in verse 33, "All of us are dying." It is possible that they thought the destroying angel would kill more than just the firstborn. If the Egyptians had not made the Israelites leave as a result of the death of the firstborn, then there would have been the destruction of the second born. The plague was heavy enough as it was, since it says that the firstborn of Pharaoh on the throne and the firstborn of the prisoner both died. The idea here is that everyone in between also lost their firstborn.

Each parent would have stayed up to see if the threat would come to pass, and they would have periodically checked their children. When the children started dying, then the weeping and gnashing of teeth started. The weeping and gnashing of teeth is a reversal of the great outcry that Israel had made up to God after their oppression had gone from bad to worse. Now it is Egypt's turn to cry out. It says that there was not a single house where there was not someone dead. The weeping and wailing all throughout the land of Egypt made Pharaoh take immediate action.

Now, the NKJV says that he called for Moses and Aaron (verse 31). This might seem to contradict what Moses said at the end of the ninth plague, which was that Pharaoh would never see his face again. What is likely happening here is that Pharaoh sent a message to Moses and Aaron,

rather than having them appear before him again. There is no conversation recorded here, and the translation of the word is most likely "sent a message." This probably happened by mounted messenger. So it is probable that Pharaoh did not in fact see Moses' face.

What Pharaoh said when he gave the message to Moses was an unconditional surrender. Pharaoh was no longer in a position to bargain or to set limiting conditions on who or what would go out of the land of Egypt. He didn't care at this point. He just wanted them out. But he makes a very curious statement at the end of verse 32: "And bless me also." How in the world could he have the audacity to make such a request of a people he had systematically enslaved and oppressed all these years? The answer to this question lies in previous history. It is always the greater person who blesses the smaller person. If you will recall, Jacob wound up blessing Pharaoh at the end of the book of Genesis. Whether this Pharaoh knew of that incident or not, he would surely have known that the greater person blesses the lesser person. So, actually, when he makes this request, he is not being arrogant. In fact, just the opposite! He has finally been humbled now before God Almighty, and there is no other blessing for him to seek except the one that Moses can give. Moses has become like Jacob to the Pharaoh. Now, there is no repentance here. He is not sorry for his past deeds. He finally concedes the point under duress, but he does not repent.

However, it is interesting that after all that resistance to God, after all that hard-heartedness, he had to give in anyway to God's demands. There is a lesson for us in that. Why not give in now and save yourself endless agony? You cannot kick against the goads and win, as God would later say to the apostle Paul. God will have His way, one way or another.

The relationship of the people of Israel with the other Egyptians comes next to center stage. Firstly, the Egyptians ask the people to leave. In fact, the Egyptians beg and plead. They naturally fear for their own lives here. Also, the Israelites, according to the instructions of the Lord, asked their neighbors for wealth, and received it, for the Egyptians were favorably disposed towards the Israelites. We see why that is when we remember that the Egyptians had just seen ten plagues that very amply demonstrated the real true God over against all their own false gods. So, the result of the war between God and the false gods of Egypt is God: 1, Egyptian gods: 0. The spoils of war go to the Israelites. It says that they plundered the Egyptians. That means the spoils of war.

However, these gifts are ambiguous. They would later be used for two things completely opposite to one another: some of the gold and silver went to furnish the tabernacle, whereas another part of it went to make the golden calf in Exodus 32. The simple question to ask is this: how are using your resources? Are you using them for God's kingdom, or are you spending them on your own idolatry?

At any rate, the Israelites could leave with their heads held high, all because of what God had done. Now it says there that there were 600,000 foot soldiers in the Israelite army. That means all able-bodied men between 20 and 60 years of age. Now, that means that the women, children, and older men are not part of this 600,000. So, the total number of the Israelites is probably about 2,000,000. Now, liberal scholars think that there is no way that 70 people could become 2,000,000 over the course of 430 years. However, such scholars have never done the math. If each family had just 4 children on average, with 25 years for each generation, the total number of Israelites alive at the time of the Exodus would be far greater than 2,000,000. Elsewhere in Exodus, we are told that the Lord made the Israelites extremely fruitful, thus fulfilling the promise He had made to Abraham.

The really amazing thing here is that a whole crowd of people went with the Israelites. These must have been Egyptians. Some of the Egyptians, therefore, were convinced that the Lord was truly God, that the God of Israel was superior over the supposed gods of Israel. The judgment of God on Egypt, then, was not only a judgment, but it was also a blessing to the people of Egypt, to those

who were converted to the true faith.

The true faith today is belief and faith in the new Moses, who has undergone the judgment of the death of the firstborn, so that we can be passed over. The one true God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The judgment comes upon all who do not believe in Jesus. But the judgment does not come to those who do believe. In fact, they are led out of Egypt, led out of darkness, out of their sin, out of the oppression of the evil one.

So we have to ask ourselves whether that has happened or not. Is it true that we have left Egypt, been freed from sin, been taken out of all that, and into God's marvelous light. Has this happened to you?

And are we walking in that light? Are we walking in that new life? It is the reality of freedom, the life of freedom, the life of service to God. Have we taken everything and left? The Israelites left with everything, and made a clean break. So also, we need to make a clean break with our sinful past. The way of our sinful past is the way of weeping and gnashing of teeth. For the judgment that came only upon the firstborn of the land of Egypt will come upon all who do not trust in Christ, when he comes again with glory to judge the living and the dead. But the break with the sinful past means a beautiful new life that God simply gives us and helps us to live.

The beauty of this new life is that God is always at hand to help. As it says at the end of the passage, the Lord kept vigil for the Israelites. The Lord slumbers not, nor does He sleep, as we saw in the Old Testament reading this morning in the encounter between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, and as Psalm 121 tells us. We should be greatly encouraged by this, especially when we feel that God is distant. He never stops taking care of us, even in our sleep. We may sleep, but God does not.

We must beware of making ourselves into gods. It is really the most insidious, and yet the most tempting idolatry of them all. We often do it even without thinking about it. It is the subtle way we put our own interests ahead of the interests of others. It might be the selfishness that keeps us from sacrificing our own goals so that our loved ones might accomplish theirs. It might be rushing to tell your spouse about your day first, when maybe your spouse wants to tell their story first. So, to get rid of the idolatry of self means to put others before ourselves.

So let us walk in the beautiful new light of the new life in Christ. Let us make a clean break with our sinful past. Let us be encouraged by our ever-watchful God, and let us avoid the idolatry that gripped Pharaoh, and that has gripped all humanity since Adam: the idolatry of self.

Sermon Outline:

I. Introduction: Fear

II. The Final Plague (verses 29-30)

A. The Plague Itself

B. Pharaoh's Response (verses 31-32)

C. The Egyptians' Response (verses 33-36)

III. The Exodus (verses 37-39)

IV. Summary (verses 40-42)