

The Firstborn
Exodus 13:1-2, 11-16
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The book of Exodus has many of the great themes in all the Bible. We see salvation clearly portrayed in the Exodus itself. We see the law of God given on Mount Sinai. We see the sovereignty of God over all the so-called gods of the world. We see the principles of circumcision and Passover strongly present as well, especially as they direct us towards baptism and the Lord's Supper. Here in chapter 13 we see the introduction of a new great theme: that of redemption. The firstborn of every womb belongs to the Lord, whether animal or human. The firstborn of the animals were to be sacrificed to the Lord, and the firstborn of all humans was to be redeemed.

So what is redemption? Redemption implies slavery. For instance, in Israel, if a person could not pay off all his debts, then he could sell himself in slavery to the person to whom he owed his debt, and his work would then be the payment of the debt. However, if the person had friends and family who were willing to put up the money, then they could pay that price to the slave owner, and the slave would then be redeemed by the ransom price. So, the important elements in redemption are: the situation of slavery, the slave owner, the family or friends with money, and the ransom price itself. When the ransom price is paid, then the slave has been redeemed.

This is related to what the Lord means when He says that the firstborn belongs to the Lord. He is the owner of all the firstborn babies of Israel. Now, why does the Lord own these firstborn? It is because of the Exodus. As verses 14-15 say: "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.'" What this passage is saying is that the firstborn of Egypt were the ransom price for all the Israelites. The Lord took all the firstborn from the houses of the Egyptians, and this meant that the Israelites had been redeemed from the Pharaoh, who had been the slave owner before. If you think about that for a minute, it seems strange. How could Egypt's own children be the ransom price paid to Egypt for the Israelites to be redeemed? The answer is that all the children of the world belong to God as He is the Creator. The Lord paid the ransom price to Pharaoh out of His humanity. All the people of the world belong to God. Obviously, we are not saying that all people are saved. What we are saying is that God created all people, and therefore all people belong to God. So, if all people belong to God, then all the Egyptians belong to God, and when God paid the ransom price from all the Egyptian dead, the result was that Israel was redeemed by the blood of the Egyptians. This is the only way to explain why the Exodus is the basis of redeeming the Israelites. Of course, the Passover Lamb was central in all of this, for the Passover Lamb is what set apart the Israelite children from the Egyptian children. The Lamb marked the people of God as the people to be redeemed. There

can be no redemption without blood. And that is the significance of the Passover Lamb.

So all the Israelites were redeemed from slavery to Pharaoh, and the Lord could have said that all the Israelites had to be redeemed. But the Lord did not do that. Instead, He only required the first-born to be redeemed. This is not only evidence of God's grace, but it is also important for recognizing the principle of the firstborn throughout the rest of Scripture.

The principle of the firstborn belonging to God is very similar to the principle of the first-fruits of the harvest also belonging to God. In effect, the principle of the firstborn says that all belongs to God by way of representation. Eventually, the principle of the firstborn culminates in the firstborn of God, Jesus Christ. God was well-pleased with His firstborn Son, Jesus. Jesus was not born in time. He was born in eternity. He has no beginning of days nor end of life. But Jesus is still the firstborn. We say that He was eternally begotten of the Father before all worlds, as the Nicene Creed puts it. The firstborn of God belongs to God. This same principle of redeeming the firstborn also happened to Jesus. His parents paid the money due for the redemption of the firstborn. The money was paid to the temple. This freed Jesus from any obligation that He had for Himself. Jesus was free to redeem others, since He Himself had been redeemed. He owed no one anything. He did not even owe His Father anything. As a result, anything He earned could be put directly to the payment of the ransom of His own people. This is a vital principle to understand: Jesus owed nothing for Himself, and as a result of that, He could pay everything for us.

Now, we must at this point consider our own condition. For, in our natural condition, we are slaves to sin, sold under slavery to sin. Sin is a harsh taskmaster. Sin is a cruel oppressor. And sin will not let us go for anything less than the full price of Jesus' blood, the sinless one, the spotless Lamb of God. That is what is required to redeem us. That should give us pause when we think about our sin. Our sin is so heinous in the sight of God that it required nothing less than the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us of its guilt and power. Nothing in this world should make us hate sin more than that thought: that it required the blood of Christ to be the ransom price for us.

Just as much as we should hate our sin is also the same degree to which we should love our God. We were slaves to sin. We owed all this debt, a debt that is completely unpayable. This debt makes us completely insolvent, completely bankrupt. And yet our God was willing to pay that ransom price for us. And what a price it was! Every drop of Jesus' blood is more precious and saving than all the diamonds and jewels in the world put together. One drop of Jesus' blood is worth more than the entire universe. One drop of Jesus' blood can save the entire world, it is worth that much. It is beyond price, and beyond count. And that blood was given for us! And Jesus did not give just one drop. He gave his entire life's blood. He wants us to know how willing He was to do that for us, how willing He was to give Himself away for the benefit of His people. That the God of the Universe should shed his own blood for the sake of mere human mortals! How great is the love of God for us! It should make us enraptured with the love of God. It should constantly stun and amaze us. If it does not, then we need to be reminded once and again, of just how much God does love us. Do you know this about your God? Is this the kind of God you worship? The God who redeems His people is the only God there is. And He

loves us with a love surpassing our understanding.

Have you been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb of God? Has your sin been taken away by the amazing love and grace of God the Father, through the finished work of Jesus Christ, and applied to us by the all-powerful Holy Spirit? We have a redeeming God.

God loves us so much that He wants us to know it and remember it. One of the ways we do that is to remember that God owns all things. Verse 13 tells us this: “with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck.” Now this is a very practical principle for us today. Obviously, we don't apply it to us directly, since none of us own donkeys that I know of. But we have to find the principle here. The principle is that we should never use for our own personal gain what belongs to God. Donkeys were very useful animals. They carried heavy loads. They also carried people. They were very common in ancient Israel. What about them, then? What were they supposed to do with the firstborn donkeys? The Lord told the Israelites that they were to redeem the firstborn donkey with a lamb, but if they did not do it, then they were supposed to break its neck. In other words, they were not supposed to use for themselves something that had been dedicated to God. The obvious example for us is the tithe and offering. Of course, all our money belongs to God. We are only stewards, servants entrusted with these moneys in order to use them to further God's kingdom. So, really, all our money should be used for God's kingdom. And we need to make sure that we are extra careful about equating God's kingdom with our comfort, and all the other things we like to have. But especially the tithe and offerings should go to God, and we should not be using that money for ourselves. The Lord has promised to bless the cheerful and full giver of the tithe and offering. What is the tithe? It is a tenth of what we earn. Now I do not intend to set up our family as a perfect example of true piety, but it is important for the pastor to lead by example. Our family tithes ten percent of our gross income to the church. And the Lord has blessed us. We have no lack in any way, shape or form. The Word of the Lord is in fact trustworthy, and the Lord has told us that He pours out blessing when we give to God what is His. Please do not hear in this a plea for a larger salary. As I just said, our family has no lack, and we are quite content with our salary. But think of all the things our church could do with a full tithe! I challenge everyone here to pray about it, and to look to the Lord for guidance in this, as in all things. Just as the firstborn belong to the Lord, so also the firstfruits also belong to the Lord. And so we learn two things: we learn about the love of God, and we learn what our response to that love ought to be.

Sermon Outline:

I. Redemption

II. Firstborn

III. Jesus the Firstborn Redeemer

IV. Our Condition

V. Applications

A. Redemption

B. Gratitude in our Tithes and Offerings