

“SIGNS OF REDEMPTION”

**I. Introduction**

- A. Israel’s exodus from Egypt was such an important moment in the historical outworking of God’s plan of redemption that the Lord commanded that it be commemorated by a variety of feasts and rituals.
  - 1. We learned about one of those feasts in Exodus 12, where the Feast of Passover was instituted.
  - 2. That feast not only pointed back to what happened at the time of the exodus, but it also pointed forward to the coming of Jesus Christ as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
- B. The two practices that the Lord institutes in the text that we have just read also find their ultimate fulfillment in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
  - 1. Like Passover, these are God-given signs that emphasize key aspects of the salvation that God provides for his people.
  - 2. As we study this passage today, we will see that it has much to say to us about what our God has done to save us, as well as the function that God-ordained signs play in the life of faith.

**II. The Feast of Unleavened Bread**

- A. While the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the consecration of the firstborn might seem unrelated, there is a reason why they are treated together in this passage.
  - 1. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated in the spring, because that was when the exodus took place.

2. Spring was also the time when domestic animals typically gave birth.
  3. This is why these two ordinances are set alongside each other in this passage.
- B. After introducing the consecration of the firstborn in verses 1-2, Moses then gives instructions about the Feast of Unleavened Bread, saying to the people, "Remember this day in which you came out of Egypt."
1. This is not the first time we have come across the word "remember" in our study of Exodus.
  2. God did not want his people to forget how he had delivered them from the house of bondage.
  3. And in order to help them remember, he instituted feasts and other practices that memorialized what he had done for them.
  4. God has done the same thing for us, giving us the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
  5. We do these things in remembrance of Christ and what he has done to secure our salvation.
  6. The sacraments are not mere memorials, but they certainly do have a memorial function.
  7. They help us remember what our Savior did to save us from our sin.
- C. God commanded the Israelites to celebrate a feast involving unleavened bread because this reminded them of how they had left Egypt in such haste.
1. The exodus happened so quickly that they did not even have time to let their bread rise before they started their journey.

2. And the reason why they made such a speedy departure was that the Lord brought them out by his “strong hand.”
3. You may have noticed that that phrase is repeated four times in this passage.
4. Whenever you see this kind of repetition, you should think about the reason for the repetition.
5. In this case, the repeated reference to God’s “strong hand” underscores the severity of Israel’s plight in Egypt.
6. Egypt was a house of slavery for God’s people.
7. They never would have been able to save themselves from their state of bondage.
8. The exodus only happened because God brought it about.

D. The same thing can be said of us.

1. We cannot save ourselves from our slavery to sin.
2. As Paul explains in Ephesians 2, apart from Christ we are all dead in our trespasses.
3. A dead person is utterly powerless.
4. Our only hope is for God to extend his strong hand and set us free by making us alive together with Christ.
5. This is why the gospel alone is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

E. As with the Feast of Passover, the Lord commands his people to teach their children the meaning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

1. Once again, we see believers being commanded to instruct their children in the faith.

2. This is the primary thing that the Bible has to say about raising covenant children.
  3. We need to teach our children who God is and what he has done for us.
  4. This is something that Christian parents need to be reminded of.
  5. It is not uncommon these days for Christian parents to focus upon other things, things like finding a church with a lot of kids the same age as their or finding a church that has an exciting youth program.
  6. This is not to say that our kids cannot have friends or that they cannot have any fun, but we need to remember that the Bible does not emphasize these things when it comes to the spiritual nurture of covenant children.
  7. Our focus in discipling our children should be upon catechizing them in the faith and teaching them how to participate in the church's worship.
  8. They need to know what Christians believe and why we believe it.
- F. Another thing that we see in this text is that it places an emphasis upon the covenant solidarity of God's people.
1. Even the Israelite children who were not alive at the time of the exodus were taught that they belonged to the people whom God brought out of Egypt.
  2. They were participants in the exodus.
  3. It was not just a story about what happened in the past.
  4. It was their story too.

5. As Douglas Stuart explains, "In God's economy *each* generation of his people is expected to cultivate an identification with all the experiences of all the generations, and all the generations must identify with the events that have happened or will happen to *any* generation." [315]
  6. This is especially important today, because we are living in a culture that has little regard for the past.
  7. We need to realize that the story that is told in the Bible, along with the story that is unfolding across church history, is our story.
- G. Moses tells the people that their regular observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread "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."
1. You may know that some Jews took this statement to be a literal command.
  2. They made little boxes, called phylacteries, and filled them with tiny scrolls and tied them to their bodies.
  3. But that is not the point that is being made in this verse.
  4. Moses is simply saying that this feast will be an aid in remembering what God has done.
  5. It will help God's people to regularly think about and talk about God's truth.
  6. This is why Moses says that "the law of the LORD will be in your mouth."
- H. This is one of the reasons why God gives his people signs and sets apart certain times for sacred use.

1. God uses these things to strengthen our faith and to stimulate a response of grateful obedience.
2. This is why it is so important for us to be in corporate worship each Lord's Day.
3. It is why our church's Session has followed the Reformed tradition's longstanding practice of having both morning and evening worship services on the Lord's Day.
4. Who among us can say that we don't need a double dose of God's Word each week?
5. Who among us would not benefit from participating in the Lord's Supper every week?
6. The better use you make of the means that God has appointed for your spiritual growth, the more you will find that his law is in your mouth.

### **III. The Consecration of the Firstborn**

- A. Having looked at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we turn now to consider what this passage tells us about the consecration of the firstborn.
  1. To 'consecrate' something is to set it apart as belonging to God.
  2. God instituted this practice in order to remind the people of Israel that they all belong to him.
  3. The firstborn were representative of all of the people.
  4. This becomes clear when we remember that in Exodus 4:22 God called all Israel "my firstborn son."
  5. God's claim upon the literal firstborn among the Israelites was representative of his claim upon the entire nation.

- B. The consecration of the firstborn also pointed to Jesus, whose parents consecrated him to the Lord in obedience to this law, as Luke tells us in his Gospel.
1. Jesus' consecration has relevance for you.
  2. It means that if you have been united to Christ, then you have been consecrated to God in him.
  3. This is why Paul says in Romans 8 that Jesus is "the firstborn among many brothers." (v. 29)
- C. God claims the people whom he redeems to be his own.
1. Of course, as Creator and Ruler of all things, God has a rightful claim over everything.
  2. But he makes a special claim upon the people whom he chooses to save.
  3. He sets us apart as distinct from the world.
  4. The apostle Paul applies this principle when he exhorts the church in Corinth to avoid sexual immorality, saying, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Cor. 6:18–20)
  5. If you are a Christian, then you have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ.
  6. Sin is no longer your master.
  7. You are not your own master.
  8. You belong to God.

9. This is the reality to which the consecration of Israel's firstborn pointed.
  10. Through Christ, God has purchased us out of our slavery to sin and self so that we might be slaves to righteousness.
- D. In verses 11 and following, Moses gives specific instructions for the consecration of the firstborn in Israel.
1. The firstborn among their animals were to be given to the Lord in sacrifice.
  2. The one exception to this was donkeys.
  3. While the Israelites used donkeys for transportation and work, donkeys could not be sacrificed because they were unclean.
  4. For this reason, firstborn donkeys had to be redeemed by sacrificing a lamb in their place or they had to be killed in a non-sacrificial manner, by breaking their necks.
- E. Moses also told the people that they had to redeem their firstborn children.
1. A lamb had to be sacrificed in place of every firstborn child in Israel.
  2. This practice served as a perpetual reminder to God's people that they were under the same judgment as the Egyptians.
  3. They too deserved to die when God entered Egypt in judgment, but in his mercy he spared them.
  4. The redemption of the firstborn reminded Israel that the only reason why they were under God's blessing was because God had provided a substitute to bear the curse in their place.



5. This in turn assured them that they were accepted by God, because it showed them that their acceptance was not based upon anything in them but upon God's gracious provision.

F. The sacraments function in the same way for us today.

1. Your baptism assures you that if you trust in Christ, you have really been cleansed of all of your sins.
2. The Lord's Supper says to those who partake of it in faith that they are partakers in all of the blessings that Christ secured for his people.
3. Listen to how this is expressed in this question from the Heidelberg Catechism:

"How does the Lord's Supper signify and seal to you that you share in Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and in all His gifts?"

"In this way: Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread and drink of this cup in remembrance of Him. With this command He gave these promises: First, as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup given to me, so surely was His body offered for me and His blood poured out for me on the cross. Second, as surely as I receive from the hand of the minister and taste with my mouth the bread and the cup of the Lord as sure signs of Christ's body and blood, so surely does He Himself nourish and refresh my soul to everlasting life with His crucified body and shed blood." [Q. 75]

4. Our God gives us these signs of redemption so that they might serve as aids to our faith.
5. In the Lord's Supper, he assures you that you really are one with Christ in his death and in his resurrection, and he calls you to live in fellowship with Christ and his people.

6. So as we prepare now to celebrate this sacred meal together, let us reflect upon the fact that our lives are not our own if we trust in Jesus Christ.

7. In the words of John Calvin,

“We are not our own. Let not our reason nor our will therefore sway our plans and deeds.

We are not our own. Let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh.

We are not our own. In so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.

Conversely, we are God’s. Let us therefore live for God and die for God.

We are God’s. Let God’s wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions.

We are God’s. Let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward God as our only lawful goal.”