

Passed Over

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at Christchurcheastbay.org. Today's scripture reading is from the book of Exodus, portions of chapters 3 and 12, as printed in your liturgy.

A reading from the book of Exodus. Do not come any closer, God said. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.

Then he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. At this, Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down.

[1:19] To deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land, to a good land, a broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Moses said to God, Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you. And they ask me, What is his name?

Then what shall I say to them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites.

I am has sent me to you. Tell all the congregation of Israel, that on the tenth day of this month, every man shall take a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.

Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts, and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast.

[2:32] And on all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgments. I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are.

And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you. When I strike the land of Egypt. When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony.

And when your children ask you, what does this ceremony mean to you? Then tell them, it is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.

Then the people bowed down and worshipped. The grass withers and the flowers fade. But the word of our God stands forever. Good morning to you all.

I am the better looking pastor Andrew referred to a moment ago. And my name is Jonathan. We are going to be starting a new sermon series today in the book of Exodus and on the Ten Commandments over the coming weeks and months.

[3:47] We are going to go all the way through all ten of the commands because the church has historically put these at the center of her teaching ministry.

Especially for children and for new believers. For virtually all of church history. When people ask, how do we do discipleship? How do we teach our kids the Bible?

What do new Christians need to know about the Lord? The answers have always included the twelve articles of faith in the creed, the six petitions in the Lord's Prayer, and the ten commandments that we find in the Bible.

And so, basically, the church has always said, we need to tell people who God is, the creed. We need to tell people how to talk to Him, the Lord's Prayer. And we need to tell them how to live to

please God.

The Ten Commandments. And you remember how the Ten Commandments begin, hopefully. These are famous words. It begins, I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

[4 : 54] And we're just going to spend the next few weeks on that sentence. I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. And we're going to try to get into our heads and into our hearts the details of who this God is, what He did to bring His covenant people out of their oppressive bondage and into freedom.

And as we just sit in this central story of redemption and of deliverance in the Old Testament, as we connect that central story up with the central story in the New Testament of redemption and deliverance in Jesus Christ, we hope that we will begin to have a fresh appreciation for this life of freedom that God intends for His people.

And that we'll begin to see these Ten Commandments that He's given us not as a burden, but as a blessing. Not as a restraint, but as the pathway to freedom.

And that we'd see them not as a cold list of hard laws in the abstract, but rather that we would see that these are words given to us by the lover of our souls who wants what's best for us.

That we'd see them as the wise and loving counsel of one who's redeemed us and enabled us to call Him our Heavenly Father. We'd see these commands as the way that God intends to preserve us in the freedom that He's won for us.

[6 : 25] So that's where we're going to be going. And if you want to, we just sort of had to pick up little bits and pieces of these passages this morning, but if you want to follow in your pew Bible, feel free to pull that out.

We're going to be in Exodus chapter 3 and Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. And then we're going to turn to Exodus chapter 12 where we see God's work of judgment and mercy in the Passover lamb.

And I may regret trying to take on two of the biggest chapters in the Bible in one sermon, but we'll see about that. We're going to talk about the God who comes down, the God who passes over, and the God who gives freedom.

Who is this God of the Bible? He's the God who comes down, He's the God who passes over, and He's the God who gives freedom. And so let's talk about the God who comes down. Who is this God who gives the Ten Commandments from this fiery mountain in Exodus chapter 20?

He's the same God who reveals Himself to Moses at this fiery bush in Exodus chapter 3. And that fire, which you see throughout this book of Exodus, the fire is a symbol of the presence of God.

[7 : 39] It's a symbol of the holy presence of God. And if you just look at verse 5 in chapter 3, it says, Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals for the place where you're standing is holy ground.

And then He said, I'm the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. And at this, Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. You notice, first of all, this is a personal and relational God.

He's revealing Himself. He's communicating Himself to this individual named Moses just as He communicated Himself to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob because He's present to them. He's drawing near to them and He wants to be known by them. He wants to be loved by them in a personal relationship. He wants them to know His love.

And yet, He's a fiery God. He's a holy God. He's this absolute and transcendent, infinite, and eternal God. And that's why this God says, Moses, come close, but don't come any closer.

[8 : 45] That's why He says, Moses, come. I want you to be with me, but you've got to take off your shoes. And why does Moses hide his face? Why is he afraid to look directly at God?

Because he knows that I'm a mere creature and this is the Creator God. This is the Almighty God and I depend on Him for everything, for my every breath.

But more than that, what we really need to see is that Moses knows this God is holy. This God is pure. This God is perfect. He's righteous and He's just.

And Moses knows and we know that we're not. That we were made for this high and noble purpose to be the image of God reflecting all of who God is into this world.

And yet, from that high place we've fallen so low. From that noble calling, we've rebelled so drastically. And so now, our condition is that this image in us is distorted.

[9:51] This image is damaged so that we no longer perfectly reflect back to God His purity and His perfection and His holiness. And that's why Moses hides his face.

The Scriptures tell us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And Moses has an awe. He has a respect.

He has a reverence for who this God actually is. And modern people, I think, are kind of the opposite of Moses, right?

We tend to think that we can just sort of casually waltz into the presence of God and that our being there with God is a gift to God.

Right? And that it's, we're gracing Him with our presence. And the Scriptures just have the exact opposite view. Right? Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 10.10, the Lord is the true and living God.

[10:54] He's the eternal King. Hebrews 12.29 says that our God is a consuming fire. And so it's only right, Moses would tell us if you're going to come to God, it's only right to humble yourself before this eternal King whose blazing glory, his blazing fire of His holiness and His purity is such that you just, you can't just come to Him as you are.

You've got to take off your shoes. And we should be rejoicing that He's even made it possible for us to come into His presence. Look down in verse 13.

Moses enters into this dialogue with God and he says to God, suppose I go to the Israelites and I say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you and they ask me, what is His name?

Then what shall I tell them? And God says to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you're to say to the Israelites. I am has sent me to you.

We can spend the rest of the sermon on that, but we won't. What is my name? I am who I am.

[12:06] I am without beginning. I am without limitation. I am without equal. I am dependent on nothing and all depends on me.

I am the self-existent, unseen, unchanging, dynamic, living being, ever-present, ever-active.

And Moses, I want you to tell them, I am over you and I am right here with you and I am for you, all-sufficient and omni-competent for your every need.

That's who I am. That's my name. Now, if I give you my name, okay, my name is Jonathan Barry St. Clair. And if I give you my name, I'm inviting you into a relationship with me.

I'm admitting a desire for accessibility and vulnerability that I want to be known and loved by you and I want to know you and I want to love you, right?

[13:23] If I give you my name. But if you hear someone call me Johnny, not Jonathan Barry St. Clair, but you hear somebody call me Johnny or J or JB or Johnny Bravo or J-Rock as I was called in college.

There's hundreds of nicknames, okay? If you hear someone call me by those names, you know that we're family, right?

We have the closest and most intimate relationship possible and that's basically what's happening here. This holy God who speaks to Moses from the burning bush, he says, I want you to call me by my special name.

I want to be on a first name basis with you and I want you to call me I am who I am. And if you call me by my special name, then you know that we have this exclusive and intimate relationship with one another.

And what is that relationship all about? Well, look at verse 7 where God speaks to Moses and he says from this fiery bush this holy presence, he says, I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt.

[14:37] I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers and I am concerned about their suffering. This eternal, self-existent, holy God is also a compassionate God.

He is also a caring God who graciously identifies himself with the needs and the pains of his people. He says, my people are experiencing misery and bondage and oppression and injustice and I want you to know I see them.

And my people are crying out in these agonized pleas of helpless victims there in Egypt and I want you to know I hear them. He says, my people are suffering because they're stuck, they're trapped, they're bound and enslaved and not only are my eyes upon them, not only is my ear attentive to their cry but I'm concerned about them.

I'm touched and I'm moved by their suffering. And that tells us that this is not the God of the deists who is remote and distant and unaffected by our sorrows and our prayers.

No, he's emotionally involved with us. He is actively related to us. And this is not the God of pantheism. It's not the God of Buddhism that says actually your suffering is an illusion and somehow you need to transcend your suffering.

[16:04] No. This is also not the God of the materialist and secularism that says your suffering is just an accident. It's just a result of blind, pitiless indifference.

And it has no meaning at all. In fact, the only meaning your suffering has is the meaning that you create and project onto your suffering. No, this is the one true living God of the Bible who sovereignly initiates this encounter with Moses in order to say I see the pain of my people and I'm entering into it.

I hear their grief and I'm choosing to participate in it. I know the distress and the suffering of my beloved people and I'm embracing it now as my own.

Friends, do you know this God who sees you and who hears you and who is concerned about you? Your depression and your anxiety, God says, I see you.

Your loneliness and your grief, God says, I hear you. Your hurts from the past, your addictions in the present, your despair about the future, God says, I am concerned about you.

[17:22] And here to these Israelites who for 80 years at a minimum have experienced genocide, the genocide of their children, they've experienced miserable servitude, they've experienced abuse after abuse and they're wondering why God is this suffering so intense and God how long is this suffering going to continue and God says, I'm paying very careful attention to you.

I am intensely and deeply concerned about you and I want you to know I have a plan and I have a purpose. And what exactly is that plan and that purpose? We'll look at verse 8.

He says, so I have come down to rescue them from the land, the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up to that, out of that land and into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

This is God's calling card. This is his brand. I am the God who comes down. I'm the come down to the rescue God.

I'm the God who gets decisively involved and who intervenes and interferes in your life and in this world. I am this holy yet compassionate God and I am not a powerless pushover because I'm the sovereign of the universe.

[18:44] I'm the high king of heaven and when he sees that his people cannot save themselves, he comes down to rescue them with justice and mercy.

And if you read from Exodus 3 to Exodus 12, you know that this rescue operation he's declaring to them moves heaven and earth.

Right? The creator is uncreating his creation with these 12 plagues of cosmic justice. He comes to turn this world empire upside down and inside out in order to set what's wrong right and to destroy the dark power that's destroying his people.

And what does this God do when he comes down to the rescue? Does he just unleash a bunch of plagues and take them out into this howling wilderness, this chaotic wasteland and give them a bottle of water and a map and some matches and say, alright guys, you're on your own.

Good luck. Hope you find your way. No, he completes what he begins. He finishes what he starts. He says to them in verse 8, see that I'm coming down in order to bring you up.

[20:01] I'm coming down in order that I might bring you up into this good and spacious place of freedom, this place of milk and honey.

I want to bring you up into an abundant life, a life of blessing, a life of flourishing, a life of shalom, of peace with God and peace with each other and peace with yourself.

That's what he's saying. The God of the Bible is a God who comes down with good news. He comes down with a message of hope, a message of redemption, a message of peace and this God, this I am who I am God is the father of Jesus Christ.

This is the God who came down by the Holy Spirit to the womb of the Virgin Mary and took on our human flesh and our human nature. He's the God who came down in Jesus Christ to rescue us once and for all.

Not just to break the grip of Egyptian tyrants and taskmasters. No, he came down to break the grip of sin and death in our lives.

[21:06] He came down in Jesus Christ not just to bring justice on us but to bear justice on his cross. All the bondage of our sin and our shame and our suffering and evil and death, Jesus took it on himself.

He came down to do that and he came down in order that he might bring us up. Not just up into a freedom in the promised land but up into the freedom of his resurrection life.

Up so that we might become new creatures in his new creation. That's what he wants to bring us up and into. And the reason I'm harping on this is because if you don't know this holy God, if you don't trust this holy God who graciously comes down to the rescue then whatever we have to say about the moral law of God, whatever we have to say about the ten commandments of God, it's not going to help you at all.

Because it's no use knowing how this God wants you to live unless you actually know him. Unless you actually have a relationship with him.

Unless you've actually experienced the rescuing grace and the saving power that he has to offer you. That's where you have to start. The God who comes down.

[22:28] But we also want to talk not just about this God who comes down, we want to talk about this God who passes over. And this is turning to Exodus chapter 12, the God who passes over.

And remember we're starting this sermon series on the ten commandments that we find in Exodus chapter 20. And so we're asking ourselves the question, who is giving those commands?

What is his name? What is he like? What are his attributes? What's his character? How does he relate to us? What's his history? What's his track record? What does he do? Is he good?

Is he trustworthy? And I hope that you'll be convinced that this is a God that you can trust. If this creator God designed you then surely he knows best how to help you live the life that he designed. If this God has redeemed you if he's come down to rescue you then surely he has a purpose and a plan not to harm you or not to repress you but to liberate you and to bless you.

[23:36] Can I trust this God enough to obey him? That's the question. And it's sort of like the question that Pharaoh king of Egypt asked Moses. In Exodus chapter 5 he says to Moses he says who is the Lord that I should obey him?

That is like the question. Who is the Lord that I should obey him? He's saying Moses what is so unique about your God and your faith that I should trust him that I should embrace him that I should follow him?

And there's probably no better answer to that question of what is so unique about God than Exodus chapter 12 this famous passage of the Passover Passover and you know what is so unique about God?

What is so unique about faith in this God? The biblical vision of ultimate spiritual reality is right here. Right? For Jews the Passover meal is the central thing that makes them who they are.

And for Christians a revised Passover a reinterpreted Passover meal called the Lord's Supper it's the central act of worship. We're going to do it here in just a moment. What makes this God so unique that I should obey him?

[24:49] And the answer to the question is this. The bloody death of a helpless victim. It's at the very heart of the Bible. The bloody death of a helpless victim.

At the very center of biblical faith the vision of ultimate spiritual reality is the bloody death of a helpless victim. Why? What do we mean by that? Well God called Pharaoh king of Egypt over and over again to release the Hebrews from their grinding poverty and slavery.

And of course he refused over and over. And so God releases these ten plagues of justice. It's God's cosmic justice to dismantle this dehumanizing empire.

And he gets through these plagues and now we get to the tenth and the final plague. And it says in verse 12 on that same night Exodus chapter 12 verse 12 on that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn both people and animals and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt.

I am the Lord. I am. I am. God's just judgment is coming down on this empire that's been resisting God and abusing his people.

[26:07] people and it's as if God is bringing that great future day of divine judgment forward into the present so that on this one night and in this one place there will be a temporary and preliminary day of devastating judgment.

And God says I'm going to allow all the things that I'm typically holding back to flood in. I'm going to allow this destructive chaos to go through the greatest military and economic power the world has ever seen.

And he says there's only one thing that can protect you. And what is that one thing that can protect you from the ultimate power in the universe?

It's the most unlikely thing. It's the most bizarre and crazy thing. It's a lamb. It's a woolly quadruped. It's the weakest possible creature you could imagine.

God says the only way you can face the ultimate power in the universe is a lamb. Look at chapter 12 verse 3. He says tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family one for each household.

[27 : 21] And then he says in verse 7 then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door frames of the houses where they eat the lambs. What he's calling them to is a public act of faith. He's telling them today in the next few hours you have to take a stand.

You've got to declare yourself to be a person and to be a people that are under the blood of the Passover lamb. And if you read the whole of Exodus 12 one of the first things that jumps out is this principle of spiritual egalitarianism.

And what I mean by that is if you look at Exodus 12 verse 22 which we didn't print for you. Moses goes and he talks to the elders of Israel and he says okay you've got to put this blood on the top and the door frames of your house and then he says this he says none of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning.

And when the Lord comes through the land to strike down the Egyptians he will see the blood on the top and sides of the door frame and he will pass over that doorway and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

And you know what that means when God says none of you are to go outside of your door or your house until the morning. You know what that means? That means that God's justice is not just for the Egyptians but that if an Israelite does not have the blood of the lamb over their lives they're going to get God's justice too.

[28 : 49] And you say well wait a minute. I thought the Israelites were the oppressed victims and Egypt and the Egyptians were the oppressing victimizers.

I thought Israel was worshipping the true God and I thought Egypt was worshipping false idols. How can this be? Yet it says that if any of God's people were to meet God's judgment without the blood of the lamb they too are going to be lost.

They're going to be destroyed. They're going to be struck down. And why is that? Well what sinful human being can stand unsheltered, unprotected in the presence of this holy God who says I am who I am.

Who can stand without some sort of protection? Spiritually speaking the most doctrinally orthodox, the most spiritually engaged, the most biblically righteous, the most morally pure Israelite on that night was no better than any Egyptian.

Christian. And God says if you go out and you try to meet God's judgment on your own and you do not place yourself by faith under this blood of the Passover lamb that I provided then your SAT scores and your athletic trophies and your fancy degrees and your resume and all of your achievements, your racial identity, your ethnic heritage, your doctrinal beliefs, your ethical behavior, none of that is going to do you any good.

[30 : 27] None of that's going to help you and protect you at all. You Israelites, you're going to be just as lost to the people you despise, the Egyptians. But here's another thing that jumps out in this passage that not only this principle of spiritual egalitarianism but also this principle of spiritual substitutionism.

And what do I mean by that? Well, in every single house that night there was either a dead firstborn or a dead lamb. Either the people deserving God's just judgment died or the lamb got what they deserved.

The lamb, you see, is the substitute, the blood of the lamb, the life of the lamb took your place. That every Israelite looked at the lamb on their table and they said the sole reason that I'm not dead is because that lamb is.

peace. And every Israelite realized that night that God mysteriously caused his judgment not to pass through them but to pass over them.

That God did not strike them with his justice. God sheltered them in his mercy. The blood of the lamb somehow satisfied God's judgment and gave them peace.

[31:49] And here's the thing. Here's the thing. Even though God delivered them that night, they had to keep sacrificing lambs. If you read the Old Testament for five minutes, you know that this is something they're doing every day and every year because God showed them that's what they needed to do because they needed to realize that they had a deeper and a bigger problem that required a deeper and a bigger deliverance and salvation.

And that's why when you finally read through the Old Testament and you get to the pages of the New Testament, you find John the Baptist there saying about Jesus Christ, what does he say? He says, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And that's why when you fast forward to the end of the Gospels, you see Jesus on the night before his cross. What does he do? He gets his disciples together and they celebrate what? They celebrate the Passover.

And Jesus gets up as the presider of that meal and instead of saying, this is the bread of our affliction, what does he say? He says, this bread is my body.

Instead of saying, this cup is a reminder of the promises of God's freedom and God's redemption, what does Jesus say? He says, this cup is the new covenant in my blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

[33:13] What he's saying, he's saying, I'm the Lamb. And my death on the cross is going to bring about a Passover, not from physical or economic or political bondage.

It's going to bring you freedom from that deeper spiritual bondage that you're in to sin and death. And if my blood is covering you, good news, God's judgment is going to pass through me so that it can pass over you.

God's justice is going to strike me so that it can shelter you. Jesus says, I've come to get God's justice so that you could get God's mercy and you can live in God's peace.

God's justice is going to And so the question for us is, what do you think is going to protect you ultimately? Do you believe that the only thing that will save you is the blood of the Lamb?

And are you putting your faith and your trust in the power of that blood in your place? Have you, so to speak, gone out and put it on the top in the door frames of your house and over your life?

[34:30] Have you gone and sought shelter there and said, this is the only place where I can really find safety and salvation? Are you making that public? Everybody could see whether or not you put that blood over your house.

Have you made it public? Are you giving testimony to the fact that this is actually my only hope and my only peace? This is my only righteousness. This is the only hope of the whole world is the blood of this Lamb.

Before we get to this God who gives ten commandments in Exodus 20, we got to know the God who comes down in Exodus 3 and the God who passes over in Exodus 12. And I just want us to think for a minute of finally what we're talking about this God who gives freedom.

The ten commandments in Exodus 20 begin on this foundation. I am the Lord your God. I am the Lord and I'm your God. And I brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Everything depends upon and flows from this starting point. The logic is this, that because I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery, therefore you should have no other gods before me, etc.

[35:44] The prophet Hosea puts it this way, I have been the Lord your God ever since you came out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no savior except me.

Do you see God's logic? Do you see the logic of the gospel that exclusive love for and devotion to the Lord begins with this reality and this experience of deliverance from bondage.

And to be set free in Exodus 12 is to go on this journey to Mount Sinai in Exodus chapter 20 where the full implications of your salvation are revealed in those ten commandments.

And they're joyfully accepted because you say, well this is the way to live a free and abundant life. You see the Christian journey is a journey from the slavery of sin to salvation to service.

It's a journey from guilt to grace to gratitude. And when you experience the reality of this God who comes down to the rescue in the flesh and in the person of Jesus Christ, when you experience this God who passes through Jesus in justice, in order to pass over you in mercy, you begin to fall in love with this God.

[36:58] You realize, oh my goodness, this God loves me. He loves me. And I think I love him. See, a Christian is somebody who's melted by the love of God.

When you fall in love with a person, guys, listen, when you fall in love with a girl, what do you want to do? Write this down.

You want to figure out what pleases her. And this is also very important. You want to figure out what displeases her. Okay? Girls, what do you do when you fall in love with that guy?

You want to figure out what causes him to feel loved, what causes him to feel respected, what causes him to feel honored. And you write that down. And you go and do that.

I don't know, did any of you grow up on the Princess Bride? That was like the Rosetta Stone of my entire childhood. And it, you know, if you haven't seen this, repent.

[38:08] Go see it today. Princess Buttercup. She says, Wesley, you know, fetch me the pitcher. Wesley, draw me some water.

Whatever she needs, whatever she wants. And how does Wesley respond? Thank you. I love this church. As you wish.

That's what you say when you fall in love with someone. When you realize how much they love you, you say, as you wish. You delight to respond to that love with your own love, just as you wish.

And when you look at this God in Exodus 3 and Exodus 12, and you see what he's like, and you see how he thinks about his beloved people, when you see the lengths to which he will go to deliver them and to set them free, the only proper response to this love is what?

As you wish. It's the only way to express our gratitude for what he's done for us. And my hope is that as we go through this sermon series, we will eventually come to say the words that the psalmist says.

[39:18] When the psalmist, in Psalm 119, he says, Oh, how I love your law. And that's just another way of saying, Oh, how I love you.

And because I love you, I love your law, and I want to meditate on it all day long. Why? Because it's the path to freedom. It's the path to abundant life.

Amen? In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.