

Exodus 12:29-51

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- [0 : 0 0] The telling of a great story takes time. It's simply impossible to complete in a single setting.
- One of the reasons we appreciate great literature and a lengthy summer book is that routine of returning, meditating, basking in the overall arc and plot line of the author.
- I think of this when I was reading one of my favorite works of all time, Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers*.
- About, I don't know, 1,200, 1,300 pages. But after all, the telling of a great story takes time. You might have your own author and their work, whether it be Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, or Dumas and the *Count of Monte Cristo*, or *Anna Karenina*, I don't know.
- Perhaps you're of the younger generation that doesn't read, and if so, you're lost already and the sermon hasn't even begun. I like to think of the Bible and the people of Israel and the story of Exodus as the telling of a great story.
- [1 : 3 7] I can imagine fathers and mothers reading it to their kids in some post-exilic context, night by night, making a little way, a little headway, and then laying it down until tomorrow.
- All right, look at the way last week's text ended. What a perfect ending for a parent on a particular night. Verse 28, Then the people of Israel went and did so.
- As the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. And the parent with those words closing, and the children saying, Read some more! Read some more!
- Now we'll pick it up tomorrow. Or even the way our text will close today. Verse 50, All the people of Israel did, just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron.
- And on that very day, the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts. Just enough for the day. And yet, when you read great literature, there are majestic moments.
- [2 : 5 6] And last week, we hit it. The Passover. This cresting movement, the reader's been waiting for from the opening chapter.
- This salvation, this deliverance of God's people, and even the repetition of the plagues was building in the mind of the reader. When and how will this happen?
- And then, God says, This is a new year for you. Choose a lamb or a goat on the tenth day. Then on the fourteenth day, sacrifice it at twilight.
- Eat it in a hurried state. And the angel of destruction will enter in. And this is the way in which you will be saved.
- The blood will be a sign. And it will pass over all those who are walking by faith under the lintel of God's protective love.
- [3 : 5 9] The people of Israel went and did so. And now for a week, you and I have been waiting. What happened next?

The writer is clear with this threefold use of the term night in the opening paragraph that we are situated with the people of Israel in huddled in familial settings behind a door and the distant cries of the Egyptian households beginning to rise as the firstborn of all uncovered families is taken by God by way of judgment.

You'll see the first use of night right there at verse 29. At midnight, the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt.

Verse 30, And Pharaoh rose up in the night. And verse 31, He summoned Moses and Aaron by night.

In fact, in the Hebrew, the voice of Pharaoh is restricted almost entirely to this monosyllabic kind of words.

[5 : 25] just short, brief, grasping, gasping, language, probably about one or so in the morning. Get up.

Go. Be gone. Be gone. Notice, even as he says by way of indication, verse 31, As you have said, Pharaoh and his firstborn has now pummeled this Egyptian ruler to the point where he acknowledges God has been at work in the salvation of his people.

What are we to do with this first paragraph in our reading? this moment where we're considering Pharaoh and the firstborn of Egypt and this movement for them to finally be gone.

Interestingly, embedded in the text, the very purpose for the salvation of God is listed. In the voice of Pharaoh, verse 31, Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel, and go, here's our word, serve the Lord as you have said.

The writer wants us to settle on the purpose for which God is doing these horrific acts in Egypt, but these heroic acts for Israel.

[7 : 04] We've seen this wonderful Passover meal. The aromas of lamb and goat are yet wafting in our senses and when we come to this text, in the mouth of Pharaoh, the people of God are saved that they might serve.

This is a great moment in literature then where you come off the crest of a wonderful story and then you settle in for a couple days of reading to kind of just soak in the implications of it all.

What is the outcome of salvation? salvation. Simply this, the salvation of Israel is connected to their service for God. Now, if we've been listening carefully, this word here needs to be understood because it has been repeated on numerous occasions.

Here, through the lips of Pharaoh, but it had come to Pharaoh through the lips of Moses and Aaron. the reason for which God saves is that His people might serve Him.

Just take a look back, chapter 10 and verse 3. You'll see Moses in the presence of Pharaoh during the eighth plague saying, Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?

[8 : 30] Let my people go that they may serve me. me. Or chapter 9 verse 1, Then the Lord said to Moses, Go into Pharaoh and say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, Let my people go that they may serve me.

Chapter 8 verse 1, you'll see it again, Let my people go that they may serve me. You'll see it in chapter 7 and verse 16 as well.

Let my people go that they may serve me. The voice of Pharaoh has been well acquainted with the reasons for which God saves. He saves that they might serve.

Or let me put it differently. He rescues with the intention of worship. In fact, many of the English translations don't translate the word serve or service.

They'll translate it by the word worship. Let my people go that they might worship me. So tightly connected is the understanding of that which you serve is that which you worship.

[9 : 36] And this was the very call that God gave to Moses in chapter 3 at the burning bush. Take a look at chapter 3 and verse 6.

I believe it's there. But it isn't there. Chapter 3 verses 9 through 12. And now behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppressed them.

Come and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, who am I that I should go and bring the children out? But he said, I will be with you and this will be the sign for you that I have sent you when you have brought the people out of Egypt.

You shall serve God on this mountain or you shall worship me on this very mountain. The mountain that God appeared to Moses at Sinai was the one to which he would bring the people that they might serve or worship him.

And all of this in the original language is replete with these dynamic connections to their servitude. So that when you actually enter into the first chapter of Exodus in verse 14 and you read of the harsh bitter enslavement of the people it actually is the same root word.

[11 : 02] They were pressed into bitter service. That is they had to worship or serve a pagan king. That's the way the book opened. A people enslaved in harsh service.

God comes and says I will save you that you might switch your service from that man to me. And it will come then at the mountain.

Now this is something that the author has been building toward in our own text now. When you come back to chapter 12 you are on the cusp of understanding what it is to serve God or what it is to worship.

Let me put it this way. The book of Exodus is about worship or the making of worshipers. Now we're going to take this book in three consecutive summers because as you already know the telling of a great story takes time.

And this summer we will work our way through chapter 18. Yet I want to move all the way forward to next summer just for a moment.

[12 : 15] Because when they arrive at the mountain in chapter 19 to serve God that should define for us what worship looks like.

And so you're asking yourself what does it mean to worship God? Well when I think of that I want to linger on it because worship is a high flying word in the church today.

It's like a kite that kind of mesmerizes the gaze of the church. We're all talking about worship, right? I mean there are books devoted to explaining worship.

There are women and men hired by churches for the exclusive purpose of overseeing worship. There are conferences you can go to probably even this summer on the subject of worship.

academicians. There are even chairs believe it or not in seminaries given to the extension of worship. Worship is the umbrella term for the church and we often think of it in terms of style of music.

[13 : 32] So you might say oh I love the worship at HTC Hyde Park. And if you do feel that way then you would be right but you would probably be saying something about the music.

Or you might say you know this isn't about HTC Hyde Park this is about where you went somewhere else at some other time. You say well I can't go to that church anymore because I can't worship there.

Now you are defining for those you're speaking with what you think worship is. But here's what Exodus says.

I'm going to save you that you might serve me on the mountain. I'm going to rescue you that you might worship me at the mountain. So when you go to the mountain you discern for all time what worship truly is.

And what happens when they get on the mountain? He calls them to get dressed in their Sunday vest. He tells them to prepare three days in advance. They assemble on the great day for worship and service.

[14 : 42] and what occurs for about 11 straight chapters. God speaks. God saves.

Exodus 1 to 18. God speaks. Exodus 19 through about 31. what is worship?

Worship, rightly defined, is listening to and living under God's word joyfully.

That's worship. The Ten Commandments begin to spill out and they all define the characteristic life of the people. if you want to be a worshiper of God, well, first you need to be saved by God through blood.

And then you sit under God's word and live under it joyfully. That's worship. It is a shame how we have not only domesticated the word, but reduced the word to things of style.

[15 : 58] and to a moment even in a service. You've come to a church service haven't you before where they said, well, we open up with about 45 minutes of worship and then the pastor gets up and he does his thing on the word.

Well, it's just an indication that we haven't understood yet what the Bible says about worship. Because worship is sitting under God's word and then living rightly and joyfully under it to the best of your ability.

And so as we come at this very moment in the text, we have come to a moment where we need to just savor the salvation of God's people.

The Passover is here. The midnight has fallen. The blood has been efficacious. They are now on their way to worship, which is hearing his word and giving themselves in life to it.

That is why this church from the very beginning and as long as I have breath will continue to situate itself under the simple, raw, weak preaching and reading of the word on a weekly basis.

[17 : 17] We gather around the word. That's what God's people do at the mountain. When they got to the mountain, they gathered to hear God say something. I remember being in a church service on another continent years ago and I enjoyed the worship, but after about two and a half hours of it, I was exhausted and I finally was invited to come up and preach and I said, well, we have said many words to God.

Now let us hear God's word to us. That's worship. Saved for service.

Rescued for worship. Remember the disconnect for Israel finally came with what? The golden calf. They didn't even get time to hear the Bible reading for the day and they had gone into song and dance and God says that's enough, that is not worship.

Well, what a relevant book for us today as we begin to understand what is happening with God's people at the time of the Exodus. Think of Psalm 95.

Have you ever noticed Psalm 95, how musicians often play it and how it's often read and where the reading so often stops? Oh, come, let us sing to the Lord.

[18 : 50] Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving. Let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise for the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth and the heights of the mountains are also his the sea is his for he made it and his hands form the dry land. Oh, come, let us worship and bow down.

Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker, for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. And then the music lyrics stop.

While the text continues today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. don't let in the coming 15 years people separate for you the word from worship.

They are never separated in the scriptures. They're not separated. Word and worship are inseparably linked. To be a worshiper of God is to serve God.

[19 : 58] To serve God is to sit under his word and to live joyfully in obedience to it. Well, before we move from one mountain peak of Passover to the next one, the crossing of the Red Sea, there are other things for us to linger on.

The second paragraph, verses 33 to 42, would help us understand that the salvation of Israel was not merely connected to service for God, but the salvation of Israel is connected to celebration that they bring to God.

Notice what happens. After the firstborn is struck down, all the people now are urgent to send Israel out of the land.

They're like, we're all going to die given the way this thing is going, so we would love for you all to leave us and take our jewelry, take our finest clothing, and the people themselves were plundered.

And so you have this image of the people of Israel now having been saved by God, setting out in celebration to God with this added accoutrement of things, and notice verse 38, a mixed multitude also went up.

[21 : 26] Now many people think that could be Egyptians themselves. There may have been Egyptians that said, I've seen enough too. I'm with you.

If Pharaoh lets you go, I'm gone too. But it could also likely be other slave nations that Pharaoh had captured at the time and ruled over and brought into the midst.

And so there could be other foreigners saying, look, if you're gone, we're gone too. There's no law in the land that can hold me if I come under your banner.

And so they set out this rag tag, multi-ethnic group, 600 men it says, on foot, leaving the city of Ramses, which was probably the nearest city that they were building storehouses for Pharaoh, and they are gone with the morning light.

Interestingly, though, when they're gone, you're reminded that their salvation is connected to celebration. Because you have the material return in verse 39 on the unleavened bread.

[22 : 40] You have this indication of the length of time, 430 years they had been there. And then, here's the link, verse 42, a repetition of the threefold use of the word night that we saw first in verse 29 and following.

Verse 42, it was a night of watching by the Lord to bring them out of the land of Egypt. So, this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all people of Israel throughout their generations.

that's the second thing you linger on between these mountain peaks of Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea. Saved by God that I might offer my life in service to God.

That is, rescued that I might worship but also saved with particular celebratory things to be commemorated. It's to be kept by all the people throughout the generation.

The word is simply watch. It was a night of watching by the Lord so God's people now give themselves to an annual night of watching that is kept to the Lord.

[23 : 55] If you are saved to worship God, you are also saved to celebrate by watching in watchfulness. That is the way you celebrate your salvation.

To be watchful. They did it one day a year. I think we are to do it every day of our life.

There is a fascinating moment when Jesus, the itinerant preacher, begins speaking about the day of the Lord and the ultimate salvation.

And he likens it in Matthew 25 to virgins. And the connections to our text are threefold. First of all, they are out there at midnight.

Second of all, they are waiting to get into the wedding feast of the Lamb. And third, the ten are commended for being watchful.

[24 : 59] people. And it was an illustration from Jesus to indicate how you live between the mountain peaks of what he is going to do on the cross and the day in which he will come again.

The celebratory mark of the Christian is watchfulness. to keep a night of watching.

That's how you celebrate. You celebrate by being prepared, by ensuring that you've got enough to get to the end, by being productively engaged in kingdom work, by telling yourself, I don't live for this world, I'm waiting for the next world.

By keeping yourself clean as well as you can and pure and asking for wisdom as you walk through each day, you are watchful for he is coming and his salvation is nigh.

What a thing to linger on here. I think of even Paul's words in Ephesians 6 where he has them dressed.

[26 : 20] You remember how you celebrated the meal here? Belt fastened, sandals on your feet, staff in your hand ready to go. In Ephesians 6 Paul's got you dressed, he's got your belt of truth on.

You are watchfully there so that you can withstand in the evil day. That is Christian life. How watchful have you been?

Well, Peter and the boys in the garden came to know how quickly their watchfulness gave way to weariness and their weariness gave way to sleep and their sleep gave way to unpreparedness and their unpreparedness gave way to sin because they weren't ready.

Our text, very clear, this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations.

I think that's one of the things that happened to me last week in the preaching on unleavened bread. Just remembering that leaven required lingering and salvation means moving and a stripping away of all the things that might entangle me to be to be watchful.

[27 : 46] Well, may we give it another run even this week. May you go forth from here and when people say, what did you do in church today? You say, well, I was recalling that I need to be watchful until I hear God's Word read again next Sunday.

What are you doing this week? Well, I'm learning that worship is exposing myself to the Word and joyfully living under it and that my life is given to watchful care.

And I can't go more than six days before I've got to hear a word again that would put me on the way.

Final word, less time taken upon it, 44 to 49. Not only is the salvation of Israel connected to service for God or that is rescued for worship, not only is the salvation of Israel connected to celebration to God, that is by watchful living, but here in this last little section, salvation of Israel is connected to a statute given to us by God and it concerns our relationship to the world.

Notice verse 43, and the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, this is the statute of the Passover, no foreigner shall eat of it. Or notice that word again, statute, played similarly down in verse 49, there shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.

[29 : 27] The bookend of that last unit is about a statute that you're to reflect on. Now a statute is normally something that's put forward by a legislative body that's actually in text.

I mean, it's actually written down. We could get the folks in U of C law school to come up and explain this much more readily than I could, but the simplicity of it is simply that a statute or a law is something in this case inscripturated.

This is binding. Your salvation on the night of Passover comes with it some binding things I want you to know about. Yes, worship.

Yes, watch. And now I have a law for you concerning your life and its relationship to the world. Well, what is it?

No foreigner takes this meal. I mean, it's repeated throughout there. This is only for those in the community of faith.

[30 : 32] Yet, and here's the beauty of the text. while there's an exclusivity to God's people, there is a universality by way of entrance.

I think of this little phrase at the end of verse 44, 44, but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him.

Or down again, not only in verse 44, but see verse 48, if a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised.

In other words, it's exclusive. God's salvation belongs to God's people alone. Yet, anyone can get in if they come in through the sign, in this case, of circumcision.

You know, the Christian faith gets a bad knock for being a religion of exclusivity. Because it is one of exclusivity.

[31 : 51] Christ alone. There is no other name found under heaven, given to men by which you may be saved. That's jarring.

Those are jarring words of exclusivity. Yet, when you read a text like this, you need to also remember in one sense, I am a universalist. I'm a universalist in this sense.

The message I proclaim is open to anyone. But you have to come in under the statute, the way anyone comes in. There's one law for all people.

It's the law of Christ. The circumcision is changed to believe and be baptized. So, if you are willing to believe in Christ and his blood is that which is sufficient for your sin, and you are willing to be baptized, that is, undergo the sign of his name, well then, it doesn't matter what you did.

It doesn't matter where you came from. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters. In fact, it's going to go to the four corners of the earth, and people from every nation are going to be seated at that table.

[33 : 03] I want to mention that today to those of you who are not Christians. There is a way for you to enter into a relationship with God, but you got to come the way everybody comes.

And the law that he has put forward is the law of Christ, that the blood of Christ is satisfactory, and that blood alone to stand in your stead as proper payment for your sin.

And if you're willing to grab hold of him, God is willing to grab hold of you by way of relationship. And then you say, well, what's the sign of that?

Well, the sign of that is baptism. We're going to baptize people in the late August 19th or so. I already know someone here I'll be meeting with, coming to faith, wants to be baptized.

I'm telling you, you got to come to us now if you want to say, you know what, it's time for me to live under the statute of the land. It is an anomaly to think that someone would profess faith in Christ and not be under the sign given by Christ.

[34 : 23] And the sign is water. And so if you are here today going, wow, I've been coming here for a while, I'm beginning to believe this. In fact, yes, I do believe this. What do I do next?

Well, the next thing you do is get baptized. So come and talk to us and we'll celebrate with you in August under the clean waters of Lake Michigan.

the Christian calling. The Christian calling then is twofold. You bear witness to salvation by setting yourself apart from the world.

Yet at the same time, you make salvation available to any who are in the world. That's what the writer in these three paragraphs is having us land on this week.

he's having you sit for a night reading before he picks up the story again. And if you've seen this monumental act of the Passover, he says, now before I take you to the next mountain peak in this great long story, remember these three things.

[35 : 36] You're rescued for worship, which means you're going to be given to the word. Your calling is now watchfulness in preparation for his return.

You are set apart from the world, yet offering the only hope there is to any in the world. And notice how it ends.

All the people of Israel did just as the Lord had commanded. The book of Hebrews picks up on this and says they did it by faith.

May we do so even this week. Our Heavenly Father, as we give ourselves to the reading and the telling of this great story of Israel and the Exodus, help us to linger, between mountain peaks, and to savor the glories of the Passover event in ways that will instruct us on our worship, on our watchfulness, and on our manner of life before a watching world.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. God