

Divinely Defined

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[0:00] I'm going to read a little bit from the Old Testament and the New Testament this morning, starting in Exodus 12. Starting at verse 21, and then we'll go into the New Testament, Luke 22.

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb.

Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin, and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe.

Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway.

And he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down. Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.

[1:28] 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 the 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.

And the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron. And then we'll turn ahead to Luke 22.

We'll start our reading at verse 14 of Luke 22. Meeting up with Jesus and his disciples the night when he was betrayed, the night before the cross.

Luke 22, starting at verse 14. When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.

And he said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

[2:45] For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, take this and divide it among you.

For I tell you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them saying, this is my body given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

The word of the Lord. So for my father, no TV show gets the nostalgia going quite like the Beverly Hillbillies.

It aired from 1962 to 1971 on CBS. They made 274 episodes. And every single one of those episodes begins the same.

[3:57] Every episode begins with the theme song. And the song recounts the story of this family, this very unique family, and how it happened that they ended up in ritzy Beverly Hills, California.

Come and listen to a story about a man named Jed, a poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed. Then one day he was shooting at some food, and up through the ground came a bubble and crude. Oil, that is. Black gold. Texas tea. Well, the first thing you know, old Jed's a millionaire. Kinfolk said, Jed, move away from here. So they said, California is the place you ought to be.

So they loaded up the truck, moved to Beverly Hills, that is. Swimming pools. Movie stars. That moment, that moment the oil came a-bubbling up on their land, that's what you'd call a defining moment.

A defining moment. They became millionaires almost instantly. Their lives changed forever. They moved from the backwoods to Beverly Hills, and they were never the same again.

[5:19] Defining moments. These moments. They speak to who we are. They speak to who we are. They make us who we are.

They're telling. If you were getting to know someone new, for example, in a dating relationship, you're getting to know someone new, a defining moment like this is a moment that you would have to share.

In order for them to really understand who you are, you'd have to say something about this moment, because it had such an impact. Without knowing that bit of your story, they wouldn't really know you.

It's a key bit of information. If you watched an episode of the Beverly Hillbillies, without knowing the background, the history, the back story, it wouldn't make much sense.

You need to know about the oil strike in order to understand these people and understand what's going on. So, what they do is they retell that story at the beginning of every episode, through the theme song.

[6:25] They give you the back story. They give you that defining moment, that crucial piece of information each time to start things off. And the thing is, we've all had defining moments, right?

All of us. For you, it might include your graduation day, or your wedding day, perhaps, or that day that you moved across the country. Maybe there's the day you started that new job, or bought a business, or had your first child.

Maybe something really unexpected happened. Maybe something really good, or something really bad happened. And it impacted you.

It was life-changing for you in a profound way. And so there's sort of this hinge point in your life.

There's the before times, and then there's the after times, with this defining moment in the middle.

These moments are telling. They define us. They're a part of who we are. Well, this morning, I want to look at two defining moments with you. Two moments that actually came to define not just individuals, but whole groups of people.

[7:42] One of these defining moments was defining for the Old Testament people of God, and the other defining moment for the people of God today.

We'll start with the Old Testament. So the Old Testament is, actually it's full of defining moments, right? But there's one moment that tops them all, and that's what we've been considering in this series here on Sunday mornings.

It's the exodus, the exit of Israel out of Egypt. And we've been talking in this series about how God's people were enslaved there in Egypt, and God heard their cries and rescued them.

We talked about his power and confronting the pantheon of gods there in Egypt, how he fought against Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt and defeated the enemy on behalf of the Israelites.

He defeated their captors and led them out, these slaves led them out to freedom. It was a defining moment. It showed who God is, the great deliverer, mighty savior, and it showed the people, in a very powerful way, who they are, as rescued, ransomed, redeemed, set free from the enemy, welcomed in by their savior, a delivered people.

[9:01] It was a defining moment. The exodus. Was it their most defining moment? There was another moment, not too long after, actually, that would certainly also be a contender for the title of most defining moment.

Not long after the exodus, God had told his people to set up camp at a place called Sinai, at the base of Mount Sinai. And so they did that, and God, he met them there, in a powerful way.

And he revealed himself there, and really drew them in, into relationship with himself. And he revealed his will to them.

And Moses even came down from the mountain with these two stone tablets written on by the finger of God himself. And there was thunder and lightning, and it was quite the moment, there at Sinai.

But not even that. Not even Sinai tops the exodus. And we know this, because in the middle of that Sinai meeting, God refers back to the exodus.

[10:09] Right before giving the Ten Commandments, the Lord, he brings up the exodus. He says, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

That's how he begins. And he goes on from there, and gives the Ten Commandments, and all sorts of other instructions. But he starts with the exodus. It brings up that defining moment.

Really, it all goes back to the exodus. The meeting at Sinai does, the commandments, the promised land after that, and everything else, too. None of it would have happened, or really made any sense, without the exodus.

The exodus defined the relationship. It defined the people, who they were as former slaves, and then redeemed, and now belonging to God, with a special purpose. It's who they would forever be. And sometimes, in their history, throughout the Old Testament, as we read, we see that the Hebrew people, they sometimes did a good job, of remembering that, and living gratefully, before the Lord. [11:15] And oftentimes, they didn't. Right? In fact, when things got bad, they got bad, in large part, because they forgot who they were, and forgot whose they were.

They forgot the defining moment, of the exodus. Forgot who they were, as chosen and saved people, by the grace of God. And let me just give you an example.

So, in the time of the prophet Micah, the people forgot the Lord. And, really what happened, is they kind of, came to see themselves, as self-made people, rather than redeemed people.

And, pride, pride crept in. And as the proverb says, you know, pride goes before a fall. Pride comes before destruction. And that destruction, well, God didn't want that.

He didn't want to see that happen. And so, he sent in, and a good way to think of a prophet, is God's rescue squad. He, he sent in, God's rescue squad, the prophet Micah. And, and he sent Micah to, to speak some truth, and to try to change things, and turn things around.

[12:26] So, Micah confronted them, and through Micah, what does God say? He comes to them, and he says, my people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me.

I brought you up, I brought you up out of Egypt, and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you. It's like God's got tears in his eyes, as he, as he shares this, and, and, and comes to his people, and, and what's he doing in this moment?

He's bringing them back to the Exodus, right? He's bringing them back to that defining moment, reminding them that he and they have a history together, this relationship.

He's reminding them of the Exodus, reminding them of how they got to be, who they are, where they are, how it all happened, bringing them back to that act of salvation that really made them who they are.

The Exodus actually comes up over and over again in the Bible. It was this huge defining moment. A nation was born that day.

[13:38] This group of slaves was given a new life, a new start, and it's not that they sort of found some inner strength and rallied together and revolted or escaped.

No, a nation was born that day because of the grace of God, because God stepped in, God intervened. He saved the enslaved. He adopted the unwanted.

A nation was born that day. A nation of people was born because of God's power and his love and his amazing grace. And for us today, the Exodus too is part of our story.

That's our story too as God's covenant people, but our most defining moment happened about 30 AD, just outside of Jerusalem. It too was an exodus of sorts, Exodus 2.0.

God intervened and slaves found freedom and a nation was born that day. It was a defining moment. It made way for a nation made up of people from every nation, people who were enslaved to sin and working themselves to death and now redeemed, now belonging to God, adopted by God.

[14:58] The first Exodus, you see, points ahead to the second. It finds its fulfillment in the second. For the first one, God used a prophet named Moses.

For the second one, what did he do? He sent his own son. Right? And his son went all the way to death to make it happen. He became like one of us.

He took on the nature of a slave and he came to join us in the slave camp. He actually broke into the slave camp to be with us and to take on our nature.

And then from the inside, he led us out. The greater Moses. He led our Exodus. The greater Exodus. And he gave his life in the process.

In freeing us, he gave his life in the process. Which is even more amazing when you realize that at the time we were his enemies. And the Bible is clear about this too.

[16:01] Right? About our sinful nature. We were in slavery quite willingly and enslaved to sin, living in rebellion against God as the human race.

We were so lost we didn't even know we needed saving. And we didn't know that death is where we were headed and not just physical death either but spiritual death too. Separation from our God. That was our reality. And then God, by his grace and love, he intervened through Christ to change our reality. The Israelites in Egypt, they did as God had instructed and they put blood on the door

frames of their houses.

The blood of a lamb on the door frames of their homes so that they would be saved. So that the destruction would pass over them. A lamb died and they lived.

For us, our defining moment is the cross, the cross of Jesus Christ and on that cross, a lamb died that we might live. Jesus became our Passover lamb through his blood shed for us.

[17:18] We're freed from guilt and freed from our slavery to sin. And while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That's the good news. He took our guilt and absorbed our angry rebellion, took them right into the ground like a lightning rod, took them right into the ground.

He was died and was buried and then on the third day, up from the grave, he arose. Resurrection. He rose. And our risen Lord, he leads us out of the slave camp.

Like the Israelites emerging from the Red Sea and safe on the other side, we too are a rescue delivered people, former slaves set free, blood shed to buy us out, pay our debt.

The people now belong to God. That's our identity. That's who we are. The truth is though, honestly, like the Israelites, we too tend to forget our identity.

We tend to forget who we are and that's a problem. It's a problem, well, for one thing, because it's kind of a slap in God's face to forget where we've come from, to forget how much God sacrificed to make it happen.

[18:34] That's ingratitude and kind of a slap in God's face. It's also a problem because it leaves us open to answering the question of who we are in all sorts of other ways and there's real danger in that.

We start thinking that what's most basic and what's most important about us is maybe what we've accomplished or maybe what we've failed to accomplish.

We think that's maybe what really defines us, our achievements or lack thereof, our relationships or lack thereof. Maybe we start defining ourselves and others by what we have or don't have.

By what we've built, perhaps. maybe in lieu of God's definition of who we are, maybe in lieu of that, we start adopting categories of race or political tribe or sexuality and kind of make those the most basic thing about us, the most important thing about us.

We come up with these alternate answers and definitions. Or maybe it's a power thing. In lieu of seeing ourselves as slaves set free by our wonderful Savior and the grace of God, we start maybe acting like saviors ourselves, like it's up to us to save ourselves or maybe it's up to us to save that needy person or to save that good thing from failing.

[20:15] We start seeing ourselves as the Savior. That can happen too. that we're saviors or we see ourselves as failures or we're all set and have it all together or we're all a mess.

Really, the potential problems are endless when we forget who we are, when we forget what really defines us. So how do we remember?

Well, it happens in all different sorts of ways, but God's ordained for us some very special ways through the ministry of his word and through the ministry of the sacraments.

That's what these things are for. And it's amazing, really, how well our God knows us. He has this way of getting through to us one way or another.

He knows that we have five senses and we take in information and impressions in all different ways. He knows that we have different learning styles and we learn in all different sorts of ways.

[21:25] And so what does he do? He communicates to us in all different sorts of ways. It's a hugely important message. So what does he do? He splashes water on us to get our attention and he provides a meal for us and gets our taste buds going.

And he fills his book with a whole range of word pictures and epic stories and a whole variety of poems and letters and prayers and promises and prophecies.

They're all telling us in all different ways who we are. The Passover became a yearly feast.

It became this special occasion for the purpose of remembering remembering the Exodus and it allowed the Hebrew people to go back every year to that defining moment.

And Jesus on the day before he died on the cross what did he do? He did Passover with his disciples.

[22:36] Right? And in the middle of the Passover it's really interesting Jesus he turns to his disciples and he says this he says do this to remember me.

This meal this this remembrance meal. Keep on doing it but do it going forward to remember me. Do this to remember me.

And so it became known as the Lord's Supper. It's a refocused Passover. It's a way for us to remember really enter into the the greater Exodus work of God.
and it's a way for us as Christ's body to be united with him and to remember him deep down in our minds and in our bodies and with our eyes and our taste buds and in our hearts and souls in a sacramental way through the mystery of sacrament we ourselves are brought into the story and we're brought back to that defining moment defining moment of the cross.
when we survey the wondrous cross we're reminded we get redefined and reminded and reassured that it all happened and he did it all for me for us and reassured that what the Bible says about me is true that the angel of death did indeed pass over me thanks to the blood of Jesus and precious in his sight God's word tells me who I am the water of my baptism tells me who I am and reminds me and this meal that he prepares for us reminds me too thanks be to God let's pray together Lord forgive us for so easily and so often forgetting we thank you for patiently and persistently reminding us in all these ways reminding us who you are who we are we profess oh Lord as we approach your table that you are our Lord and you are our Savior and we are your saved ones a delivered people delivered over from death to life what a gift don't let us ever forget it and use this sacrament prepared for us today to drive it home to us to drive it deep down into our souls meet us here we lift up our hearts to you in Jesus name amen
[25:24] Thank you.