

Protected by Blood

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[0 : 0 0] Please be seated, friends. And like last week, I'd like to begin the sermon with a plug for a book. Not everyone's a reader. I love reading, but I know not everyone's a reader.

But as Christians, I think we, as a discipline, want to be reading the Bible regularly and reading God's Word. And I think it's good for the Christian life to read some great, meaty Christian books, even if you're not an avid reader, and this would be a great book to read.

One of the best, actually, John Stott, The Cross of Christ. This is one of the best defences of the cross since our own Leon Morris did his work about 50 years ago.

This is the book to read, The Cross of Christ. And I've read a couple of times, and I just commend it to you. I think it's in the church library. I'm about 66% sure of that.

And so they're the odds. But it's still in print, and it's a great book. It's worth selling your shirt and reading that book. And I've got some quotes from it later in the sermon that help us explain this difficult event called the Passover.

[1 : 1 1] I mean, last week, I wanted us to see something of the horror of God's plagues. I mean, we all know Psalm 19, the heavens declare the glory of God. We know that the beauty of creation is in when it reveals the glory of God.

Last week, we saw the horror of creation when it reveals the judgment of God, when creation is turned on its head against God's enemies in the plagues of hail and thunder and blood and darkness.

And I think one of the big questions that if you're an Israelite sitting through these plagues, that would be just this gnawing anxiety that you'd be having is you'd be wondering, why are we being spared?

Who are we that God has promised to protect us while the Egyptians are suffering? Why does our livestock as God's people, our livestock is not diseased, but all the other Egyptians, their livestock and food supply is diseased?

Why is Goshen spared hail? Goshen, the area where the Israelites live, why are they spared the destructive thunder and hail and Egypt is smashed by it?

[2 : 2 3] Why is Goshen in light when Egypt is in darkness? If you're sitting with your family in your household, you'd be thinking, who are we that God is sparing us?

We can hear in the distance the destruction that's happening in the chaos of a plague. Who are we that God is protecting us? Are we worthy of such protection?

And today we're going to find out, unpack this question more about how and why God's people are protected. Moses, at the beginning of his journey, he was scared of Pharaoh.

More and more as we move through the book of Exodus, people are getting scared of God. Pharaoh is seen to be actually just a man, not to be feared. And more and more we're going to see that God is the one to be scared of.

Even if you are in the people of God, God is to be feared. Moses will be wondering, he won't be wondering, who's going to rescue us from Pharaoh?

- [3 : 26] After today, he'll be wondering, who's going to rescue us from God if God ever turns on us? Well, God himself gives the instructions about how to be protected.
- The instructions are specific. And this is the inauguration of a kind of a festival in the life of Israel, which then flows into our Lord's Supper, our communion.
- But the actual instructions for the first night are these. This month shall mark for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Because what God is going to do in the Passover when God strikes, the hand of Pharaoh is compelled and they will escape.
- Therefore, they will in this sense tonight in the Passover become a nation. It will be the birth of a nation, a nation that is federated and freed as they leave Egypt.
- This is going to be a new beginning, a pivotal point in Israel's history. And so God says, tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the 10th of this month, they are to take a lamb.
- [4 : 32] A lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its neighbour in obtaining one, and you will divide it in proportion to the number of people in each house.
- That's important, by the way. We'll come back to the household thing in a minute. Your lamb should be without blemish, a year old male. You may take it from the sheep or the goats.
- You shall keep it for four days until the 14th day of the month. Then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. So to inaugurate the nation just before the Exodus, just before the Passover, a lamb is to be slaughtered, a perfect sacrifice, a one-year-old sheep or a goat.
- Later on in the book of Exodus, there'll become more specific laws about what to do with specific animals, but now it can just be any one-year-old perfect, unblemished sheep or goat.
- Now it's important for us to see, friends, the way God deals with Israel here, because he deals with them at two levels. He deals with them as an assembled church, as an assembled congregation as we are today.
- [5 : 47] They are to slaughter the lambs in the whole assembled congregation at twilight. But there's another level on which God is interacting with his people, and that is by household.
- Verse 3 is actually poorly translated because it's trying to squeeze out the language of man and gender language.
- What verse 3 literally says is, each man, that is each head of a household, shall take a lamb according to the father's family, according to that household.
- So the idea is that God is actually going to interact with Israel on an assembled level, but also on a household level through the head of that household, through the father.
- And the father is the one responsible for protecting and covering the family with the instructions that God provides. And this sort of headship over the household extends even later in the Exodus to children who aren't present, who aren't yet born.
- [6 : 50] And so when the children ask, why are we having this thing every year? The father will say, this is when God rescued us, us as a family, as a household.
- And in a minute we'll see that correspondingly God deals with Egypt by household. And so what is the head of the house to do? Well, they shall take, verse 7, some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the homes on which they eat it.
- And so this is a very public act of faith. Each household that belongs to God, that has faith and trust in God, is going to be publicly marked out by blood, as Matt shared in the kids' talk.

And I don't think it would just be like a, not just a dot on the doorpost, sort of a symbolic dot. You would actually smear blood around the door and around the top of the lintel.

It would be a public act. It's kind of a distasteful act. But everyone would know, well, they would at least know you're doing something very strange and distasteful. But they would hear, you are doing this because you follow Yahweh.

[7 : 58] You follow God, the God of Israel. And then in the house, they have a meal. But it's not like your Sunday roast that you're about to have, even if you have lamb.

This is a very awkward meal. Listen to how it's described. Verse 8, They shall eat the lamb the same night, roasted over a fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

So that is bread that is cooked in a very rushed way, without yeast, and with bitter herbs. It's not meant to really taste good. It's a sacrificial meal. It's a symbolic meal.

Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roast it over the fire with its head, legs, and inner organs. The whole animal is going to be sacrificed, and so it's either to be eaten or burned up.

You shall let none of it remain until the morning. Anything that remains until the morning, you shall burn. And then verse 11, Here's how they eat it. They probably wouldn't even sit down to eat the meal on this first night.

[8 : 57] You shall eat it, your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, your staff in your hand, and you will eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the Lord.

And so later on, when they commemorate the Passover, it will be a party. It will be a joyful celebration. But the first night, it's an anxious meal.

It's a fearful meal. Your loins are girded. That is, your Middle Eastern robes for the men are tucked into your belt with shoes on, ready to run, ready for God to strike and to escape from Egypt.

You've got your staff in your hand. You're ready to go. It's a very hurried, trembling occasion. You should be worried eating this meal because God is about to strike.

He says in verse 12 and 13, This is what I'm going to do. I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals.

[10 : 04] On all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgments. I am the Lord. So the reason we have a Passover is because God is having a pass through in judgment.

God is coming to execute judgment, and it's horrific. And he's God. It's deserved. And the Passover is God sparing certain households if they follow his commands.

God is going to visit and strike down the gods of Egypt, the little g gods of Egypt. Sin is, in effect, trying to be God. God says in the book, The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God.

That's a great definition of sin, that when we try and run our own life and be free from God and be independent of God and rule ourselves and be our own king and God, that is an attack on God's own sovereignty.

And God is going to judge the would-be gods of Egypt, and he's going to judge them household by household by striking the future head of each household, that is the firstborn son.

[11 : 17] Later on in Exodus, when they get to Sinai to worship, God explains more of this really when he says in the Ten Commandments, I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me.

And of course he goes on to say, but blessing to the thousandth generation of those who love me. What is he saying? But God is treating people household by household, and so some households are going to be saved, and some are going to be judged.

Now where does God get the authority for this? He says, from himself, he says, I will execute judgment on all the gods of Egypt, for I am the Lord.

That is the divine name. I am Yahweh. I am who I am. I will be who I will be. I am forever powerful. I have no rival. I submit to no one, says God.

I fear no one, says God. God asserts his authority in his name to be God and therefore to judge, to strike.

[12 : 24] He is the Lord, the God who executes his own judgments. And if you read on in chapter 12, you actually can read what happens on that night.

I'll give you a little snippet. Chapter 12, verse 29. At midnight, the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon.

So from the highest to the lowest. And the firstborn of all the livestock. Pharaoh arose in the night. He and all his officials and all the Egyptians.

And there was a loud cry in Egypt. For there was not a house without someone dead. There was not a house without someone dead.

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and said, Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites. Go, worship the Lord as you said.

[13 : 29] Take your flocks and your herds as you said. And be gone. And bring a blessing on me too. This is the final judgment which compels Pharaoh to let Israel go.

And it happens. Finally, Pharaoh says, You can go. Be gone. And it does actually happen. Although along the way, he actually, again, relents. But it's too late. And he chases them.

It's too late. So friends, God's judgment is very serious, isn't it? It's horrific. And this judgment can only be partial in effect.

It's only really partial compared to what Jesus promised in the day of judgment when he would come to judge the living and the dead. So whatever we see here, as horrible as it is to us, should make us tremble at the coming day of judgment.

It will be much, much worse. How can anyone be spared? How can you be protected? Well, the answer is by blood. You'll be protected by blood as Israel was.

[14 : 30] God says it exactly, actually, in chapter 12, verse 13. The blood shall be assigned for you on the houses where you live. When I see the blood, I will pass over you.

And no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. They are protected from blood. Now, from our vantage point, we know about Jesus Christ dying on the cross, the ultimate Passover lamb.

Then we would say, as God went through Egypt in judgment, and he saw a house with blood on the door, God, if we can put it this way, God would have said to himself, of that house I have given my firstborn son.

Therefore, I will pass over it. Of that house, my son will be crucified. His blood will be shed for that house, because the blood is on the door. Therefore, it will be spared.

They will be freed. And so when Jesus arrives, you know, 1400 years later, someone sees him and says, behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the whole world.

[15 : 41] Jesus comes to be the Passover lamb, the fulfillment of this event. It couldn't happen. They couldn't be saved without Jesus Christ, and God knew it would happen this way.

In and of itself, there's no power in a lamb's blood, but only in the blood of the Son of God. And so in Israel's life, after this one horrible night, they will commemorate it with a joyful feast.

Similarly, in Jesus' life, he had one horrible night, a horrible meal, going to a horrible evening in the garden, going to a horrible bloody death on the cross.

And we remember that with our own festival, with the Lord's Supper. Now friends, last week, I drew out this point that people are saved, not just to be saved from slavery or from consequences of sin.

We are rescued to become worshippers of God, to become in relationship with God, to enjoy God. Today we can modify that language even more to think about what exactly are we saved from.

[16 : 48] Ultimately, what is Israel saved from? It's not just being saved from Egypt, is it? Israel is saved in the Passover from God himself.

They are saved from the judgment of God. They are saved from the wrath of God poured out. And so we could say of us, we too are saved and delivered from the wrath of God to become forgiven followers of God, to become forgiven worshippers of God.

Who are we saved from? You could say sin, you could say Satan, but ultimately, we are saved from the judgment we deserve through the gift of Jesus Christ, through the gift of God's Son.

God himself always provides a way to be covered. He always provides a way to be protected from his own judgment. The Passover is bloody and messy and ugly.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is bloody and messy and ugly. But friends, that's our salvation. When the finger of God strikes, we are saved by the blood of Christ.

[18 : 06] And there's no other escape, is there? See, you can't escape God's judgment or your punishment through trying to be a good person, through trying to make amends. You can't do it.

You can't be, you know, you can't just be a religious person and therefore escape the wrath of God if you've sinned. Even going to church won't save you from the wrath of God.

You know, we could get Bishop Hale next week to lay hands on you and do what he likes to you. He can't help you. Only the blood of God's Son can save you from God's wrath.

The God of love, the God of promise, is also the God who executes judgment. God himself is the executioner. The book of Hebrews says, without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness of sin.

So we can conclude from this, there can be no exodus without the shedding of blood. There can be no birth of the people of God without the shedding of blood. There can be no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood.

[19 : 13] No redemption from slavery without the shedding of blood. No relationship, no worship without the shedding of blood. It's true to say sin is violent.

It's true to say judgment of God is violent. And we need to also say salvation is violent. It involves, it has to involve the shedding of blood.

And friends, there is nothing you can do to make yourself worthy of that. You have not shed your blood for any of your sins. Nor will you if you trust in Jesus Christ. His blood was shed for you.

You have not contributed to that. You have not made yourself worthy for that. It's a transaction that happened, a transaction in blood that happened 2,000 years ago for your free salvation as a gift.

This is good, friends, because this is good news. Because this is why we can have confidence. This is why we can have assurance that you are forgiven. Because God did it himself in his son.

[20 : 15] He did it in a real transaction of blood. God himself poured out his judgment on his son. In Exodus, the cross of Christ is different to the Exodus and different to the Passover as well.

There are many similarities, but there are many differences. One difference is this. In the Exodus, in Egypt, God himself pours out judgment and simply spares households.

But in the cross of Christ, God is both the pourer out of judgment and the recipient of judgment in his son. Because, let me complete this quote from the start.

Because when I read you the quote before, I was misleading you a little bit because I only read you half the quote. This is the full quote. The essence of sin in man, the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man.

See how it's reversed? Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be. But in salvation, God sacrifices himself and puts himself where only man deserves to be.

[21 : 36] Do you see how in salvation, God substitutes himself for us and absorbs his own wrath onto himself so that we can be completely and utterly forgiven by grace.

This is a free gift, friends. It's a free gift that was first promised in this form all the way back in the first Passover that foreshadowed the death of Christ.

Friends, it's a wonderful gift. Never think that you are earning your salvation. If you ever, you ought to think, I don't deserve this salvation.

Like the Israelites sitting in his house, the father with his children thinking, who am I to be spared? Holding a firstborn son saying, who am I to be spared this judgment? I've just put a lamb's blood on my door.

What's that going to do? And yet, by faith, that is how we are saved. By faith in blood, we are protected by blood, protected by the blood of God's own son.

[22 : 38] Isn't that a wonderful gift? Friends, let me encourage you to live by this gift, to live for this gift, to live sharing this gift with others and not keeping it to yourself.

I'll close with these beautiful words from a hymn by Martin Luther. And this is just fantastic stuff. Martin Luther says, Here, the true Paschal Lamb we see, whom God so freely gave us.

He died on the accursed tree, so strong his love to save us. See, his blood doth mark our door. Faith points to it.

Death passes over. And Satan cannot harm us. Alleluia. So let us keep the festival where, to the Lord invites us, Christ is himself, the joy of all.

He is the sun that warms and lights us. By his grace he doth impart eternal sunshine to the heart. The night of sin is ended.

[23 : 43] Then let us keep the feast today that God himself hath given. And his pure word shall do away the old and wicked leaven. Christ alone our souls can feed.

He is our meat and drink indeed. Our faith would seek no other. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Damn. Amen.