

# Extraordinary Grace

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Morning, everyone. Great to be in church with you and online with you. One of the things that I love reading about is military history. I've always had an interest in it and a bunch of little facts, such as this one. It is known as the shortest war in history. In fact, it's one of the greatest mismatches of power of all time. It occurred on the 27th of August, 1896. It's known as the Anglo-Zanzibar War. It turns out a usurper had taken the throne in Zanzibar, which is now part of Tanzania in Africa. It was an area that was kind of controlled by the British at the time.

The British didn't like the fact that this person had sidestepped the process and taken the throne. They hit him with an ultimatum for this pretend ruler to step down, for him to stand down his troops and to evacuate the palace, to vacate the palace. In the meantime, while that ultimatum was out there, the British forces brought their navy in, their marines, their sailors, and they managed to get about 900 locals on side. As it turns out, the ultimatum was ignored.

I think the deadline was something like nine o'clock on a Monday morning or something like that. It was ignored. At 9.01, the bombardment started. The pretender to the throne lost 500 soldiers, and the British lost one. When they say lost one, they had one soldier wounded. I think a self-inflicted wound, but that was all. It was a massive mismatch of power. In 38 minutes, it was all done.

38 minutes, and the white flag went up above the palace. One of the biggest mismatches of power in history. But it's not as big as the mismatch we've seen in the last couple of chapters in Exodus and what John took us to last week. God's chosen people, Israel, are in slavery in Egypt, and through Moses, the God of all creation calls Pharaoh to release his people that they might worship him and serve him.

Release them from slavery here that they might serve me over here. And Pharaoh, as we saw last week, defiantly declares, who is this Lord that I should obey him? In other words, I will not submit to him.

[ 2 : 3 7 ] I will not obey that ultimatum. And I'm going to continue on enslaving God's people. And so God shows him, and in fact, as it says in the early chapters of Exodus, that all the world might see that he is on the throne alone. And so what he does is, one by one, he defeats the pretend gods of Egypt.

And today, we come to the final one, the final plague. We've had nine. This is the last plague. This final plague, in fact, gets us to the heart and to the uniqueness of the God of the Bible and of the Christian faith. So what I want us to see today, three things. If you've got the St. Paul's app, it'd be great if you open it up, because you can see the outline there. I've got three main points and a couple of other sub points in there. What I want us to see is what this passage says about the sacrificial lamb. I want to then trace through the Bible the drama of the lamb, and finally, to issue a call to look to the lamb. So first of all, the sacrificial lamb. Nine times, God has called Pharaoh to release his people, or there will be a plague. Nine times, they have ignored it.

And every time, as John said last week, every single plague is a taking down of one of the deities of Egypt. Nine times, he's called it. Nine times, he said there will be punishment. Nine times, there have been a plague. Every single time, they've ignored it, and there is a consequence.

And the final straw is in chapter 12, verse 12. This is the final one. On that same night, I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. And so the final plague is the final defeat of Egypt's deities. And the Pharaoh was regarded as the incarnation of one of one of those deities, the sun god. The Egyptian deity, who in fact was defeated in the previous plague, the plague of darkness. And so this final plague, number 10, the final plague is to kill the firstborn, is to destroy the incarnation. This is the final defeat.

Of the gods of Egypt. And in verse 23, Moses is speaking to the Israelites about what God has said. And he says this to them, he, that's God, will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down. One of the themes that runs through the whole Bible is that when you violate God's design for creation, when you violate his design for our bodies and for relationships, in fact, he's designed for everything in life, what gets unleashed at that point are forces of decay and chaos.

[ 6 : 22 ] And all this decay and chaos has a trajectory towards a final accounting, final reckoning, a final judgment for living life as if the God of this universe does not exist, and going about daily life, violating all of his good purposes for life. And this is what this account here in Exodus 11 and 12 is pointing us towards. When God says the destroyer will come, he is saying that the time of reckoning is upon you.

And he's bringing it. He's the one who's bringing the reckoning. And on this one night in Egypt, the destroyer will come and they will bring, he will bring judgment. Justice will be upheld for the oppression of Israel. God will hold them accountable for violating his will, his design, and his purposes for life. And in fact, the Bible, the thing of the Bible is that every single human being will be held accountable for violating his will, design, and purpose for life.

But in Exodus 11 and 12, alongside this news of devastating, irreversible judgment to come upon the most powerful nation on earth, there is good news in here. God also reveals at the same time that there is only one way to stand against the destroyer. There is only one way to be protected.

There is only one way to find refuge when the destroyer comes. And the answer is a lamb. A lamb. That's it. Our little sheep. How on earth can Israel be protected from the most devastating power in the universe by Curly and Sean? I mean, how's that possible?

It doesn't make any sense. This is, however, what God instructs here. He instructs his people to kill a perfect lamb. Put the blood of the lamb on your doorposts and eat the lamb in haste. And when the destroyer comes, the destroyer will notice that your house is covered in the lamb, the lamb's blood, blood, and it will pass over you. And then you'll be liberated from slavery.

[ 9 : 26 ] That's the essence of Exodus 11 and 12. Now, that is confusing at best. But it's also offensive to the modern person.

This passage here that was just read out to us makes no sense at all unless it's put in the context context of the whole Bible in its historical context. We need to understand the drama of the lamb to get the meaning of what's happening here in Exodus 11 and 12.

So let's look at the drama of the lamb. The first scene of the drama of the lamb in the Bible is Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22.

So if you've got your Bibles, you can flick over to Genesis 22. We'll be there for a little bit. God instructs Abraham to offer up his only son, Isaac, as a sacrifice to him.

Now, when I read that as a modern person, my instinct is to think how really inappropriate thing for God to say to Abraham to go and offer up his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. It's insane to the modern mind and especially the modern Western sensibilities. Surely Abraham would have thought exactly the same as I do. Surely Abraham has the same mind on this that I do.

[ 11 : 06 ] No. No, he wouldn't have. He exists in a different cultural context than we do. We tend to think, and especially those of us who are marinating in a Western culture, we think in terms of individualism. Ancient people didn't have individual aspirations.

Aspirations were for the prominence and for the success and for the prosperity of their family. It was deeply connected to their family and tribe. If a family member acted shamefully, then the whole family was responsible for that member acting shamefully.

We don't think like that in Western culture and certainly not in Australian Western culture. We are our own people. We are radically individualistic.

And so if I've got a delinquent brother or sister, that's their problem, not mine. If they're shameful, that's no shame on me. That's not how it worked in Abraham's culture.

We are radically individualistic. And yet the reality is for us is that we are so much the product of our family for both good and bad. Abraham also existed in a time and a culture when the firstborn son got everything. They inherited the entire estate.

[ 12 : 35 ] And so God's message to Abraham in Genesis 22 was absolutely crystal clear to him, even if it's confusing or monstrous to us.

In fact, Exodus 22 verse 29 helps us understand what is happening here in Genesis 22. You must give me the firstborn of your sons.

Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. The life of every firstborn was God's unless the life of that firstborn was redeemed.

Every year they had to pay the price of redemption for the firstborn. Otherwise, the life of the firstborn would be forfeited for the sake of the family.

And the clear message to ancient Israel was that there is a debt that hangs over every family. There's a debt.

[ 13 : 40 ] The firstborn was liable for the life of that family. And the way of life of that family. The family goes stray.

The firstborn's responsible. That makes no sense to the modern individualistic mind, but it's absolutely crystal clear to Abraham what's happening here.

And that's why Abraham doesn't balk at it. But if God... Take God out of it. If a voice came to Abraham and said, Abraham, go into the tent right now and kill Sarah.

He would have gone. That's not a voice of God. That is not a message from God. That is against everything that God declares to be right and true.

He would not have obeyed that one. But with Isaac, Abraham realized God was calling in the debt. This is God calling in the debt.

[ 14 : 49 ] And God had a right to do it. Isaac was going to die for the sins of Abraham and his family.

And the emotion of this moment is in Genesis 22, verses 7 and 8, when Isaac says, Father, yes, my son, Abraham replied, the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb?

Where's the lamb for the burnt offering? Abraham answered, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.

Abraham would have been hoping with all of his being that that would actually be true. He's not just distracting Isaac from the truth of this matter. He is hoping with all of his being that in this moment, a substitute would be provided.

A lamb. So that Isaac didn't have to die for his sin. Now, for the modern mind, in our individualistic culture, this whole account here in Genesis 22 is primitive, and it's monstrous to us.

[ 16 : 08 ] The first objection that we tend to have is the fact that every single person is living wrongly and under judgment and owes God a debt. Don't like that concept at all.

Most of us have been marinating in and therefore bought into the notion that we live by our own standards, we determine what is right and wrong for us, and we do that either as an individual, we do that individualistically, or we do it as a family group, as a tribe.

Now, if that is you, that is you're bought into that notion, and if you have bought into that notion, you've got to know that for the vast majority, and I mean, say, the vast majority, of human existence, no one has bought into that view.

No cultural group has ever bought into that view for the vast majority. So it's only just a modern concept, modern formulated idea. But if that's you and you have bought into it, that there's no rights, no absolute morals, no right and wrong that I have to comply with, I live life my way, then I want you to imagine also that you have got attached around you a special recording device that records everything you think, you do, you say, 24-7 for all of your life.

Imagine that it particularly highlights every single moment when you declare how someone else ought to live. Every judgment that you have on another person because they're whatever else, they're not living up to the standards that you think that they should live up to.

[ 17 : 51 ] The standards ultimately that you say you live by that you're calling other people to live by. Imagine every one of those moments is recorded.

If at the end of your life that device was attached and put there and we push record, we push play on it, let me tell you, there's not a single person who's ever lived on the face of the earth except Jesus Christ that can stand in that moment.

Not a single person lives by the standards that they set. Not a single person. We can't even achieve our own standards in life.

Our own moral goals. Leave the Ten Commandments out of it. Leave the golden rule out of it. None of us can even live by our own standards.

Every single one of us is a hypocrite. To our own standards. None of us live properly.

[ 18 : 59 ] None of us can pass any form of moral evaluation of any sort, let alone that of a perfect God. The second objection is the idea, and again, a modern construct, that this idea of a debt that needs to be paid.

We don't like that idea. The modern construct of God, if he exists, is that if he's in the business, if God does exist, his business is to love people and his business is to forgive people.

Shouldn't, if he's God and he's so perfect and he's so great, shouldn't he just forgive people? Just wipe the debt clean? And so again, I have to ask you, if that's your view of God, that's your view of life, where in life are debts ever just wished away?

Where? Where are debts ever in life just wished away? When someone wrongs us, a debt is established. If you take my phone and you hit it with a hammer right now and destroy it, a debt has been established.

There's a value attached to this phone, you know, seven, eight hundred dollars, whatever it is, and there's only two options. If you take it and smash it, there's only two options available.

[ 20 : 19 ] Well, you pay the debt or I pay the debt. That's the only option. I either say, well, that's eight hundred dollars, please, or I say, I forgive you and release you from the debt.

But the moment I say I forgive you, in that moment, I choose to pay the debt. The debt doesn't just disappear.

The value of the phone doesn't just go into wherever the internet is. It doesn't just go. It's still there. Someone has to pay the debt.

Either you or me. If I choose to forgive you so that you do not have to repay me for this, I have to pay for it.

I either pay for it by going and buying a brand new one and therefore the value of it is costly to me or I pay for it by buying a Nokia or carrier pigeons or something, do something different.

[ 21 : 36 ] In one way or another, I pay for the debt. That is, you pay for the debt or I absorb the debt myself. It's one or the other.

This happens on every area of life. If someone robs us of an opportunity or of happiness or reputation or something else, what happens in that moment is a debt is accrued. A sense of a debt is accrued.

Justice has been violated and a debt has been accrued. And there are only two choices in that moment. You can make them pay by destroying their opportunities and ruining their reputation or you can forgive them.

But forgiveness is agony. Forgiveness is agony because you choose in that moment to absorb that debt yourself.

You don't attempt to get your reputation back by tearing down their reputation or getting your opportunities back by ruining their opportunities.

[ 22 : 42 ] Forgiveness always requires suffering. Always requires suffering. And when you don't forgive forgiveness, when you do not forgive, you suffer yourself.

Evil wins. It bottles up inside of you. Debt never just vanishes. Either they pay or you pay.

There is no such thing as forgiveness without a payment of the debt. And that's for you, that's for me, and that's for Abraham. And the good news is back in Genesis 22 at the very last minute, God, just before Isaac is sacrificed for the sins of the family, God says, stop!

And a ram was caught in a bush and it became the sacrificial sacrifice, the substitutionary sacrifice. And so then we jump back or forward as it may be, but back into Exodus and the Passover for scene two of the drama of the Lamb.

And notice these two principles here are played out for us again in this context. The first principle is that we are all equally sinful and lost. We have failed to live by God's standards.

[ 24 : 07 ] We are deserving of judgment because the debt has been accrued. Have a look at Exodus 22, sorry, Exodus 12, verse 22. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on the door, both sides of the door frame.

None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. That is saying when the destroyer comes in the night, the destroyer will come for everyone.

Israelite and Egyptian. The destroyer is coming not just for the firstborns of Egypt. One nation, yes, was the oppressor and one was the oppressed.

One worshipped false gods and one worshipped the true God. but in and of themselves, neither Israel nor Egypt could stand in that moment of judgment. Neither of them.

Israel is no better than Egypt. Christian is no better than non-Christian. No matter our race, our ethnicity, our social standing, our morals, our beliefs, our doctrine, our religion, if we are not covered under the blood of the Lamb, taking refuge under the blood of the Lamb, we are lost.

[ 25 : 42 ] The destroyer will come and we will die. And so the second principle is that our only hope, only hope for Israel, the only hope for Egypt, the only hope for anyone is a substitute.

Every single house in Egypt on that night there was either a dead son or a dead lamb. It was one or the other.

Either a dead son or a dead lamb. The lamb got what the son deserved. The lamb got, in fact, what the family deserved. The lamb got what we deserve.

Either the lamb pays the debt or the son pays the debt for the family. It's one or the other. The lamb's blood is not simply marking the doorpost, not simply marking, putting a cross on top of the house so that, you know, identifying it as an Israelite family.

The blood is a sign that a sacrifice has been made, a substitute has been offered. So just think about it for a moment.

[ 26 : 52 ] Just imagine. Imagine if there is a God and I owe this God a debt and the value of that debt is my life for not living up to his standard.

Is it possible, is it at all possible that a substitute could still stand in and pay that debt for me? You see, as incredible as this deliverance is for the Israelites in Exodus 11 and 12, it points to something much deeper.

It has to point to something of a greater deliverance, a more significant deliverance. You see, their deliverance here in Egypt was a socio-political deliverance for one people at one point in history.

That's it. That's it. As important as the lamb was on the Passover night, surely that event points to something greater, a need for something bigger, a more significant one.

The sacrifice of the Passover lamb means that there is unfinished business. How do I know that? Who actually thinks that Sean the sheep is a fair exchange for human life?

[ 28 : 13 ] Who actually thinks that? How do I know that Israel didn't think it as well?

Because God says every single year you must celebrate this Passover meal. You must remember every single year and replay it and replay it and replay it.

Remember the liberation that you had from Egypt until until a greater substitution comes, a greater liberation comes. And so we fast forward to scene three in the drama of the lamb.

And over 1,000 years later this unfinished business was still waiting to be resolved and then John the Baptist sees Jesus Christ walking towards him and he says look look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And so we push fast forward again to the night that Jesus was betrayed to death and Jesus Christ is celebrating the Passover meal with his disciples and Jesus takes the traditional place of the presider of the meal who explains the meaning of the meal and there are two shocks in this moment as Jesus explains the meaning of the meal.

[ 29 : 51 ] The first is when he picks up the bread he doesn't say what is normally said at the Passover this is the bread of our suffering.

Our ancestors suffered so that we could be liberated from slavery in Egypt. Instead he picks up the bread and he says this is my body broken for you.

This is my suffering for you. I am going to suffer for your freedom from sin and death.

And the second shock for them as they sit at the Passover meal is the bread is there the four cups of wine are there where's the lamb anyone seen the lamb there's a lamb out the back somewhere has anyone seen the lamb where is the lamb none of the gospels refer to any form of lamb at the Passover meal because the lamb was not on the table the lamb was at the table Jesus is the lamb his death as the sacrificial lamb is the central event in which all of God's relationship to the world has in fact been moving that night Jesus was going to remove the debt that hangs over every person and every family he was covering it with his blood Jesus is the substitute lamb of God he paid the price for our debt and he liberated us from slavery to sin and death human life for human life and so we fast forward to the final scene of the drama of the lamb this one is in the book of revelation where the slain lamb is now sitting

Jesus Christ sitting on the throne of the universe victor over sin and death and the judge of all humanity and the one who offers eternal life and salvation and he's gathered people those who have come and found refuge under the blood of the lamb and now sprinkled with his blood around his throne worshipping his praises forever and ever and ever in liberation and freedom and perfection he is worshipped and served by all creation as the gracious king over all creation and so thirdly with John the Baptist there's a call here to look look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world John got it in that moment he saw it in that moment he got that the first born of

[ 32 : 47 ] Israel were not saved throughout history by a woolly animal the first born of Israel was saved because God gave up his one and only son that's what Abraham and Isaac was pointing to God was going to walk as Abraham walked Isaac up the mountain carrying the wood so God was going to walk up the mountain with his son and lay the wood on him for our sakes God would not say stop in that moment as Jesus is crucified on the mountaintop outside of Jerusalem the only way Abraham's beloved son didn't have to die was because God's beloved son did so when John says look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world he isn't saying to the crowd hey hey hey look there's

Jesus the lamb of God there he is this is not a where's wally moment can you find him there he is it's not one of those it manatee to your saviour behold him notice him think about him dwell on him hear him grasp him respond to him find refuge in him and only him there is a debt against God that must be paid and Jesus died to pay that debt as your substitute as my substitute it's either you or it's him either you pay it I pay it or he pays it for us and Jesus calls us to come to him and put our trust in him to find refuge from destruction in him find eternal freedom in him that's why I've got to say again and again that statement which is on the wall behind me up here it's why we exist as a church we exist to treasure

Jesus to make much of Jesus to make him the main thing for God's glory and joy of all people we exist to make Jesus our greatest hope and our greatest delight God it's why the major push over the next five years is to see the majority of us grow much in faith in Jesus Christ what I want for you is what I want for myself and that is to grow and grow and grow in a sense of liberation and freedom that we have in Jesus to grasp him more and more growing in faith is about growing more in freedom from slavery to sin this brings joy to us your personal devotional life is meant for joy it's not a drudgery it's not a rule it's not a regulation it's a joy as you grasp

Jesus more and more and it's a joy that brings brought to others you see when we grasp his grace and his love to us it transforms us transforming us it changes us coming to Jesus means we also grasp hold of the reality the very fundamental reality that we are no different than anyone else we're not better than anyone else Israel and Egypt all in the same boat all of us have a debt hanging over us which have been released for every single one of us and it changes your view of other people the truth of Jesus Christ is a truth that does not lead to oppression of others it does not lead to slavery of others it leads to serving of others sacrificing for others this God is a God of extraordinary grace and it transforms his people into people of grace and service and radical generosity in every area of life ■ love

Thank you.