

A New Beginning

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[0 : 00] Well, please turn with me to Exodus chapter 12, starting in verse 1. We'll be looking at Exodus 12, 1 through 13. And hear now the reading of God's Word.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month, every man shall take a lamb according to their father's houses, a lamb for a household.

And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons. According to what each can eat, you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male, a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

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. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

[1 : 11] They shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted its head with its legs and its inner parts, and you shall let none of it remain until the morning. Anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.

In this manner you shall eat it with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand, and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. 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.

And on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments. I am the Lord. The blood shall be assigned 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. And let's pray together one more time.

Father God, we thank you for your word, and we pray that you would open our minds and our hearts and our ears to what you have to teach us this morning. Let us come away seeing Jesus as more beautiful and believable.

[2 : 25] Let us come away knowing the great love that you have shown us by sending your Son to be a perfect sacrifice for our sins and the new life we have in his resurrection and the joy, the presence of the Holy Spirit with us now.

So, Spirit, minister to us. In your mighty name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, good morning, New City. It's a joy to be back here with you again sharing God's word.

I bring you greetings from the Northwest Georgia Presbytery, from your brothers and sisters at Christ Community Church down in Kennesaw, Georgia, and from the students in RUF at Kennesaw State University.

Greetings. It's great to be back here. I also bring you greetings from my family. My wife and my children are here, and it's great to be with my mother here at New City. This is very much what we consider our home church, and it very much does feel like home seeing you all.

Speaking of my daughter, some of you have met her. Her name is Genesis, and she's four and a half years old. And one of the joys in her life in this season is when there's a new month because she gets to flip the calendar.

[3 : 36] Maybe you've seen this, you know, with small children, right? It's this great joy of like, you know, something new. Kind of wish I had that joy sometimes at a new month. Sometimes I'm like, whew, a lot going on.

Can we stay in the last month? Yeah. But there is something about that, right? Something special about a new start, a new beginning. Everyone loves New Year's, right? You know, fresh start, clean slate.

You get away from past problems. Here in the Passover, we see God telling his people that this will be a new start for you, that this will be a new beginning.

Then in the Passover, God marks a new beginning for his people, but it's not based on the movement of the sun or the moon or the stars, but in his work to redeem his people from their slavery through the blood of the Lamb.

Amen. The Passover points us to the good news that in the sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, we too have a new beginning. The Passover shows us what is wrong with the world and with us and what God does to make it right and the extent of his healing that it will bring.

[4 : 51] So the main thing I want you to take away from our study of this passage this morning is that God provides a way out of the slavery of our sin through the sacrifice of his spotless Lamb to give us new life.

And this, let's be honest, this is a famous passage, right? The Passover. So sometimes we can, I don't know, come to famous passages with, you know, lots of maybe baggage or things we've heard before.

It's good to take a step back and look at it very simply. So we're going to look at this passage with two questions. And for each question, I have two sub points. So the first question is, what does this passage tell us about the God who redeems?

And the second one will be, what does this tell us about the people who need redeeming, which is us? So let's look at what does this passage tell us about the God who redeems?

The first thing we want to see is that God hates sin and must put it to death. If you remember, right, the context of this passage is coming.

[5 : 53] God's people have been in slavery in Egypt, in bondage. They've been mistreated. There have been acts of genocide committed against them. And God's people have cried out.

And God, remembering his covenant love for his people, hears their prayers and cries. And he responds by sending Moses. He sends Moses back to his people in their slavery to say, God has heard your cries and he has come to set you free.

He sends Moses to Pharaoh saying, Pharaoh, let my people go. What you're doing is wrong. And Pharaoh, in the hardness of his heart, refuses to hear Moses, refuses to respond to God.

And so God responds by sending these 10 plagues. Come on, y'all, you know the 10 plagues, right? Well, here we are. This is the last one, the 10th plague, the death of the firstborn.

That God, when he sees sin in this world, right, he must respond to it. That maybe the way our world today talks about, you know, sin or evil is kind of like, well, if there is a good God, he kind of just like ignores it.

[7 : 02] You know, he just kind of papers over it. Like, yeah, yeah, you know, we're all a mess, but it's fine. Like, well, why is it fine? Because God has responded to sin.

Let's not get it twisted here. The final plague is a judgment of death on the firstborn. This plague is not just being dealt out to the Egyptians either, but also on Israel.

The death of the firstborn reminds us that there is something desperately wrong with the world, something desperately wrong with us, and that even the victims, even God's people here, they too need to be covered in the blood of the Lamb.

There are no perfect victims, that we all fall short of the glory of God and are deserving of his judgment and wrath, but for God's mercy.

God's justice is rightly terrifying. And we aren't trying to be fire and brimstone here, but we do take seriously what God's word says, that someone has to die in this final judgment, that there's no getting past death.

[8 : 16] The judgment is for Israel and Egypt both, that the Israelites don't get away with their sins just because they were born into it, that you young people here listen up well, that just because you've grown up in church and you are blessed with parents who believe, you too have sins that need to be dealt with, that you aren't an exception to the rule just because you grew up with godly parents, just because you grew up in church, that you too need to turn to Christ in faith.

Think about how visual this sacrifice is that God is commanding his people to carry out. He tells each family to take a lamb for their household.

And this would have been a time when everyone lived kind of communally. There wasn't just separate bedrooms like we have today. They're probably all sleeping in one big room. And so when they're going to carry out the sacrifice, it was probably a household activity.

You can imagine the dad saying, come on, son, help me butcher this lamb. But the importance of that visual aspect to teach the next generation that you too need this sacrifice, that you too need to be covered.

Help me sharpen the knife. Help me build the fire to cook it. The children probably would have watched this happen and probably would have helped. As children tend to do, they probably would have been asking, dad, why are we doing this again?

[9 : 45] Dad, can I go play instead? You can imagine the importance God is putting on this for the hearts of his people because he commands them in the later verses to do this every year, to practice this as a reminder that we need to be covered in the blood of the lamb.

And you can imagine, right, the child being taught, okay, yes, you too are a sinner in need of salvation. You too are guilty in and of your sins, that God hates sin and must put it to death. That this message is true for us as well, that at some point in our journeys, in our lives, to really understand what Christianity is all about, we're going to have to come to terms with the fact that God is far more offended by our rebellion against his designs for our life than you are.

That this is a double insult to him. He made you, and if he is God at all, he has rights over your behavior. That we see this sobering truth that sin requires death.

So let's pause and ask ourselves this question as we consider the reality of God's judgment. If you lived each moment in this week truly believing that God's judgment is coming, what would you say and do differently?

[11 : 09] How would you speak to your wife differently? How would you treat your kids differently? How would you treat your coworkers? So often we think this is a far-off thing, and yet the scriptures repeatedly say, be ready.

Be ready. He will come like a thief in the night. And yet we come to the humbling reality that actually, like, we could scramble and try to get it all right.

We could work really hard to say everything right, to do everything right, to go to church more, to read our Bibles more, to pray more, to get ready for that judgment. We could never do enough to make ourselves right with God.

That we could never change our lives so dramatically that we'd be ready for the judgment. That the judgment should lead us to cry out for mercy. That God had to come and tell these people, you need the blood of the Lamb.

Let me instruct you on what you need. The Israelites thought, we just need to be set free. And he's like, yes, more than you realize. Let me show you the way to truly be set free.

[12 : 15] God's judgment is a sobering reality. But my second sub-point here is that the greatness of God's mercy is beyond what we could imagine.

That yes, his judgment is rightly terrifying, and yet his mercy is beautiful and sweet and extensive. That if you think about this as a comparison, yes, God is bringing judgment here on the firstborn, but Pharaoh also brought judgment on the firstborn of Israel.

And not just the firstborn, but every male child. There was no way out, no mercy given. Pharaoh didn't say, well, if you had the blood of the Lamb, you're good. No, he said, take them all and put them to death.

God doesn't just ignore sin. He must deal with it. And, you know, many times people will say, well, I don't believe in a God who lets so much evil exist in this world. Well, guess what?

Neither do I. And if you're a follower of Jesus and you're reading his word, then neither do you. Because God hates the evil of sin. He hates the death and the pain it brings.

[13 : 26] But the problem is that we would be included in God's justice if it weren't for his mercy. And that's why his mercy is so sweet. That's why it's beyond what we could imagine.

That the God of the Bible shows mercy to all who will hear his call to them. He will show mercy to all who will turn from their ways and by faith be covered in the blood of the Lamb.

That if Pharaoh turned and repented and put his faith in the God of the Israelites, that he too would have been saved and his son as well. That this was an offer to all who would hear and respond.

The God of the Bible is willing to show great mercy. And it's in the Passover here where we see God's mercy and his justice meeting.

Right? That we see that God must deal with sin, but he provides a sacrifice in our place for the sin so that we could experience the mercy. Later on in the book of Exodus, this God speaking about his own character, will say this, the Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

[14 : 38] That the God of the Bible, yes, will deal with sin so that we can experience this abounding and steadfast love, this mercy and grace that we so hunger for.

As we reflect on God's character, we realize this great lesson about God's mercy. That ultimately, it's the object of our faith and not the strength of our faith that determines whether we receive the mercy.

We're to parse that a little bit if that was somewhat confusing. Right? It's not Israel's confidence in the blood of the Lamb that saves them. It's not how, you know, intensely they painted that blood on the lintel.

But the Lamb itself that God is telling to sacrifice and to put in their place. That it's not your perfect record of faith, but your faith in the One who can save that leads to your covering of sins.

I mean, come on, you've got to imagine, right, there's that one Israelite dad who, you know, his wife's like, all right, Moses said we've got to, you know, kill a lamb and paid the doorpost. He's like, like, it's already late.

[15 : 49] You know, like, it's kind of like, you know, when you've got to hang up Christmas lights, you know, and the dad's like, all right, son, like, help me paint them. And he's like, I don't want to, you know. And, like, the dad's out there like, this is so silly.

You know, like, why am I painting blood on my door? I'm going to have to wash it off tomorrow.

Like, these people didn't have perfect faith, but they were responding with faith in the lamb, in what God had told them to do.

It's not about how great of a Christian you are, but who you put your faith in. The sacrifice provides a way out of judgment by offering a spotless substitute.

But the substitute here does not provide permanent freedom from slavery of sin, only freedom from the temporary slavery in Egypt, that we need a better sacrifice to be offered in our place.

And isn't it great that the Scripture is clear? Let's see a couple ways it tells us this, right? If you go to the Gospel of John, John the Baptist says, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of this present time?

[17 : 02] No, the sin of the world! Not just the sins of one bad day, but the sins of your past, your present, your future, all your sins.

That Jesus is the Lamb of God that John the Baptist is preaching about. Jesus in the Last Supper, which they celebrated on the Passover, because they were celebrating the Passover together, Jesus is saying that all of history has been building up to this very moment when the one who can legitimately be our substitute and pay our debt of sin, because He is the spotless Lamb.

That on the cross, the Lamb was slain at twilight, and the justice of God fell on the innocent substitute. Jesus became a curse for us.

This is why week in and week out, we talk about Jesus. If this is your first time at church, guess what? It's kind of like this every week, because we believe in the good news of Jesus.

This is why we stress that it's not about the level of your faith, but the object of your faith. Jesus straight up says as He hands out the bread, this is my body broken for you.

[18 : 14] This is my blood poured out, the blood of the new covenant. That ultimately, we see that this is pointing us to our need for Christ.

I mean, Paul just straight up says it in 1 Corinthians 5, 7, Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Don't you love it when the Bible just lays it out like that? God's judgment was poured out on Christ so that we could know His mercy.

Amen. All right, but let's look at our second question here. What does this tell us about the people who need redeeming? What does this tell us about us? Well, the first thing I want us to see is that we are constantly looking for new ways to atone for our sin apart from Christ.

Then let's be honest. We would much rather find a way to pay for it ourselves and work ourselves out of debt than need somebody else's mercy.

That we'd rather try to figure it out on our own than we would admit that we need help. Many times when I'm on campus trying to do some outreach ministering to students, we'll have donuts, you know, at the table and we'll have a little sign that says, free donuts, free snacks.

[19 : 31] And y'all, the number of times a student walks up and says, okay, but what's the catch? What do I have to do to get a donut? I'm like, there is no catch. You can just have a donut.

You don't have to talk to me. You don't have to take a, you know, handout. You don't have to scan anything or something. You can just have a donut. It's fine. Jesus fed people. We can feed people too in the name of Jesus, right?

And yet students so many times like, no, no, but really, what's the catch? I had one young lady, she came up and like I said, it's truly free and you could see the anguish on her face.

And then finally she said, you know, I'm just going to, I'm going to take the little handout. And I said, why did you do that? She's like, because I'll feel better about it if there's some way I can pay for it, if there's something I can do to earn it.

Brothers and sisters, that this is our hearts apart from Christ. That when we do this, we throw God's mercy right back in his face. We do this in so many ways.

[20 : 34] How often in our careers do we want to justify ourselves, prove ourselves by how hard we work? Because maybe that's the one thing we feel like we're good at in life. And we're not like that, you know, guy we sit next to in the office who's always slacking and showing up late.

No, we put in the time that we can pay for it. Parents, let's be honest, how often do we look at our children and we see their success as a justification of the way we live our lives?

If our kids succeed, we can cover over areas of our life that we feel like we don't measure up. How many times have we said, this time it'll be different.

This time I'm going to read my Bible more. This time I'm going to pray more. The truth is, we can't earn it. We can't be worthy of it.

We can only rest on his mercy. We often tell ourselves if we can be smarter or fitter or prettier or more theologically precise, then it will make up for our struggles with sin.

[21 : 37] It would be like painting your doorway with pink glitter instead of the blood of the lamb. So here it is before you.

What are you going to do with your guilt? Clean up your life? Promise to do better? Become more religious? Go on a missionary trip? Feed the hungry? Have you seen this God of the Bible and the debt that you owe him?

Do you really think that you can appease him with any of it? Brothers and sisters, this is the good news. When Jesus came, his first words were, repent and believe.

Believe upon the lamb of God and his blood. The second thing that this can show us about the people who need redeeming is that the sacrifice of the lamb is meant to regularly shape our lives. As we pointed out in the beginning, God tells them, this is the mark of a new year, a new beginning. You're going to shape your whole life from this moment on. That you are going to live a Passover-shaped life.

[22 : 45] That you are going to live, you're going to have a lamb-shaped life. The sacrifice of the lamb. That Passover is a new beginning for the people of God. That the ways of their life before no longer define them.

But the costly redemption paid for by God brought them new life. Think about how important this was for the Israelites. All they had known was 400 years of slavery and oppression and being told that you're worthless and you don't matter and all you have to do is work for Pharaoh and work more and work more and then it would be great if you could die so we could get more workers in. And the God of the Bible comes and says, I have paid for you. I see you as valuable because I love you. It doesn't matter your past slavery.

No, you are now defined by me and my love and my riches. The celebration of Passover was from here on to be this yearly celebration both as a reminder of what God had done and a reinforcement of who they are.

Those who are set apart by the sacrifice that points us ultimately to the greater sacrificial feast to come in Christ Jesus. I used to work at a Christian school and I would tell my students, you know, Christians should have more parties.

[24 : 05] You know, my students would be like scandalized, like what? You know, because their understanding of what a party was was sinful, right? And I was like, no, no, no, think about it, right? Like if Jesus has really done all this for us, then we got to celebrate.

Like we have reason to celebrate. That yes, the world is dark, but we don't have this, you know, nihilistic despair that, you know, this is just what it is and we're just, you know, ants on a rock trying

to cling to one another.

No, that Jesus has given us real hope. That our faith is in the one who has done it all for us. That we have a celebration worthy of kicking off.

That we can celebrate the mercy of God shown to us in Jesus Christ. Think about the story of the prodigal son, right? The son who ran off and made a mess of his life and spent all his father's money and lived wildly and then is trudging back home in despair.

The father runs to him and covers him in a rich robe. He slips the ring on his finger and says, kill the fattened calf, let's have a party. Is it because the son figured it out and got it right?

[25 : 17] Cleaned up his life? No, he probably still smelled like pigs. And yet the father loves his son. Even his son who had spit in his face.

He loved him so much that he would wrap him in fine clothing and throw him a party. That this is the mercy we have been shown. And so we have reason to celebrate.

Let's lean into the party. Don't be like the elder brother staying outside saying, no, no, no. Let me work it off first. No, God is saying, come in and celebrate what I have done for you.

That I still love you. Even when you have messed up so deeply. The sacrifice is also a feast. But here in the Passover we see that it's a feast that must be carried out in haste.

Right? He tells them, right in this manner you shall eat it. Your belt fasten, sandals on your feet, your staff in your hand. You shall eat it in haste because it's the Lord's Passover. Because God is ultimately going to bring them out of their slavery in Egypt.

[26 : 21] That yes, they're celebrating now, but God is telling them, look, this celebration isn't the final one. That there's a better one to come. That yes, we celebrate now, right?

When we take communion, we're celebrating what Jesus has done for us, but it also points us to a greater feast to come. John writes in the book of Revelation that in the end we'll have this wedding supper of the Lamb.

This wedding feast when Christ and his bride, the church, are finally brought together. That we are looking forward to a better celebration than even the ones we have now.

That when Christ returns to make all things new, we will have a feast where we will no longer have to stand ready to leave, but we can sit down and truly rest and enjoy all that God has done.

That he has made all things new and that we get to take part in it. So to wrap things up, Passover marks the start of a new year for the people of God and that if you have put your faith in Christ alone to be your spotless Lamb to cover over your sins, then you too have a new beginning in Jesus.

[27 : 36] That you too are a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come. As we worship, as we take part in communion, we know this points us to the greater celebration to come when all things are made new in the new heavens and the new earth.

Or, to say it like John Newton said in one of his famous hymns, let us wonder, grace and justice join and point to mercy's store.

When through grace in Christ our trust is, justice smiles and asks no more. He who washed us with his blood has secured our way to God.

Amen. Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for this great news that you are the spotless Lamb for our sins. Oh Lord, so many times we run to other things to justify ourselves.

Lord, that we look too much at ourselves in the strength of our own faith. But Lord, direct our hearts and our minds to the object of our faith, Jesus Christ. Direct our hearts and our minds to you that we can rest in what you have done.

[28 : 46] Lord, let that change the way we live as you are now redefining who we are. That we don't have to go back to the old ways because Jesus has set us free. Thank you for this church and their continual proclamation of the good news.

Thank you, Spirit, for working in and among them. Thank you for those who serve faithfully here. And Lord, we pray this in your name. Amen. Amen.