

REPEAT THE SOUNDING JOY - Part Three - Teaching #2180

One Hour Christmas Eve - 2019 - 5:30 - 6:30 p.m.

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CHRISTMAS JOY AND THE EXODUS FROM BONDAGE

I want to read four texts as I begin tonight's brief message. Just don't go into shock as we read the first two. They do have a Christmas idea I want to use.

Exodus 11:4-6 - "So Moses said, Thus says the LORD: 'About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, [5] and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle. [6] There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again.'"

Exodus 12:11-12, 29-30 - "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. [12] 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.... [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 captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. [30] And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead."

Luke 2:3-7 - "And all went to be registered, each to his own town. [4] And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, [5] to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. [6] And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. [7] And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

Luke 22:14-16 - "And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. [15] And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. [16] For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'"

Of these four texts there's only one that seems evenly remotely Christmassy. The others seem morbid and out of place. Yet I've come around to a place in my mind where I doubt Luke's words about Mary and her "***firstborn son***" can land with their intended weight without those chilling words from that first Passover account in the book of Exodus.

The Exodus account keeps us from a sappy sentimentalizing of the birth of the Christ, God the Son, in that humble manger of gospel record. I want to start with a quick look at the Passover account in Exodus and define its meaning by seeing it fulfilled in the Christmas story.

1) **INITIATING ISRAEL'S RELEASE FROM BONDAGE WAS THE DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN IN THE LAND OF EGYPT**

We all know the details of this epic account. God will judge at midnight. Under a darkened sky God will require the life of the first-born in every house. None of these firstborn died of natural cause. Like it or not, the sacred text says God poured out judgment. If that's not true the words of all Biblical texts lose their power to convey meaning.

Take note this judgment is not just landing on every ***Egyptian*** house. There is no ***ethnic*** protection from judgment. This account needs to be read carefully. There is no protection for Israel in her physical descent from Abraham. No Jewish family was spared on account of personal morality or family heritage. The blood of the Passover lamb had to be on the doorposts of the house. Only through the death of that lamb was judgment on the firstborn spared.

That night the first born in almost every household in Egypt died. I'm not exaggerating. The Bible actually says this - **Exodus 12:30** - "....And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead."

This is the judgment of God ***landing***. And it lands on the firstborn. Had the firstborn not died Pharaoh would not have changed his mind. Apart from the judgment landing so horrifically on the firstborn Israel would have remained in Egyptian slavery. The death of the firstborn made the difference. The death of the firstborn launched the exodus out of Egypt. Remember, the seed of deliverance was in the death of the firstborn.

2) MARY BRINGS HER FIRSTBORN INTO THIS WORLD AND INTO THE MANGER

Luke 2:7 - “And she gave birth to *her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger*, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

Centuries roll by and another significant action will take place through another *firstborn*. But there will be no escape for this firstborn. There is no gracious pardon. There is no application of Passover blood to bring His deliverance. The sky will once again grow dark as it did that first Passover midnight. The earth will quiver as if nervously on edge.

Jesus is the firstborn of Mary who will face the same climactic judgment of God. This firstborn will die to bring escape just as those multiplied firstborn in Egypt died triggering that gigantic release from bondage.

I’m saying tonight we need this picture of the death of the firstborn in Egypt when we think of the death of our Redeemer. We need to see something powerfully dark in the death of Jesus or we will miss its greatest beauty. This is no accidental death. Divine judgment is being spent. We need to see the hand of divine judgment in the death of Mary’s firstborn in a way that jars and discomforts us.

The Exodus background of the divine sentence of death on the firstborn puts fresh edges on Paul’s already striking words about Father God’s curse landing at the cross of Mary’s firstborn - **Galatians 3:13** - “**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law *by becoming a curse for us....***”

3) JESUS FORCES ALL OF OUR CONSIDERATIONS OF HIM THROUGH A PASSOVER LENS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT

Of course, He used many different images to help us understand His redemptive mission. He called Himself a *good Shepherd*, a *nourishing vine*, the *light of the world*, *satisfying bread* and *refreshing water*.

But then He did something quite different. And the clue is in our fourth text - **Luke 22:14-16** - “**And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. [15] And he said to them, *‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.* [16] For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’**”

Think about what’s happening here. Jesus, Mary’s Firstborn, is about to die. And the final thing He wants to do - “*earnestly*” wants, according to our text - is to have a meal with His first disciples. And not just any meal. He specifically wants to have the *same* meal God initiated with those Jewish captives in Egypt **30 centuries earlier**. He wants our minds placed there.

Perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised. Meals have always been carriers of special events and meanings. In fact, we’ll probably all do the same thing tomorrow. With slight variations families will unite around that famous **Christmas table**. With slight variations the same menu will be shared, the same feelings ignited. **Ritual meals connect over decades. They unite our hearts around a theme.**

Father God knew this. And Jesus commanded the same reminder for His church right up to His second coming.

Here’s why. It’s not just that Jesus wants to use the Passover meal as a *kind of analogy* - “My death is kind of like that meal those people had way back in Egypt.” That’s not it at all. He’s not saying His death was looking back on the Passover in *hindsight*. No. He’s saying Passover was looking forward to His crucifixion *in advance*. **The meal was about Him all along.** Its meaning was all bound up in God’s greatest delivering work to come!

In a sense, all of the images come together in Christ. He is the curse-bearing *firstborn* who will die under a darkened sky. He is the *lamb of God* whose shed blood applied to our hearts cleanses from wrath and sin. His body is that same bread they ate 30 centuries earlier. He was **holding and breaking that same bread, telling the disciples it was His body.**

4) THE MEAL ISN’T FINISHED YET

Matthew 26:29 - “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine **until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.**”

Mary’s firstborn ushers in no temporary exodus. This deliverance frees captives forever. There will be a new meal,

a new song, a new kingdom, and a new creation forever. And that's a Christmas story worth celebrating!