

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: Fred Craddock told how years ago he and his wife were in a little resort called the Blackberry Inn in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee on vacation, enjoying their privacy. An old man came up to the table and intruded upon their quiet. He asked what Dr. Craddock did.

Reluctantly, he answered, “Well, I teach in seminary.”

“Oh, are you a preacher?” “Well, yeah.” He pulled a chair out and said, “I want to tell you a story.” I said, “Well, have a seat at our table here.”

He said, “I was born back here in these mountains. My mother was not married and in those days that meant shame. And when we went to town the other women looked at her and looked at me and began to guess who I was and who my father was and the reproach that was hers fell on me. And it was painful. At school the children had a name for me. I hid in the weeds at recess. I ate my lunch alone.

“I started going to a little church back in there called Laurel Springs. There was a preacher—a craggy, rough preacher, full beard, big voice. He scared me but fascinated me. I would go just for the sermon. I was afraid somebody would speak to me in the earlier part and say what’s a boy like you doing in church? And I was afraid. One Sunday after I had been going for some time, some of the people cued up in the aisle and I couldn’t rush out as I usually did. I couldn’t get by. I began to get chills, oh somebody will say something to me and I need to get out of here.

“I felt a hand on my shoulder and I looked out of the corner of my eye and it was that preacher. I saw his beard and I saw that face and I thought ‘oh no.’ That preacher looked at me and said, ‘well boy, boy, you are a child of,’ and he paused, and I thought ‘oh no.’ He said, ‘boy, you are a child; you are a child of God. I see a striking resemblance.’ He swatted me on the bottom and said ‘go claim your inheritance.’”

He said, “I was born that day.”

I said to the old man, “What is your name?” He said, “Ben Hooper.” And then he left. Ben Hooper? Ben Hooper? Oh, yes, I remember my father telling about the people of Tennessee twice electing an illegitimate governor named Ben Hooper. [*Craddock on the Craft of Preaching*, pp.28-30]

- B. Lots of things change when a person discovers they're a child of God. That is the story of the Exodus—Israel finding out what it means to be God's children; his *firstborn*, actually. **A people seemingly fatherless and weak suddenly set free to claim their inheritance.**
- C. Last week we left Ex. 10 with an impending sense of doom. The LORD, I AM, had hammered upon Pharaoh's iron-hard heart with nine escalating plagues that crushed Egypt and utterly discredited their gods. Again and again, Moses brought the word of the LORD to Pharaoh: "*Let my people go that they may worship me.*" But every time, through nine plagues and nine merciful plague endings, Pharaoh reneged and refused. Till it came down to one last angry confrontation between him and Moses. **Ex. 10:28-29... Ex. 11** steps back into that story and fills in the details of Moses' last words to Pharaoh—the promise of the tenth plague, the plague of death upon the firstborn of Egypt.

Turn to **Ex. 11:1-8...** Did you see that phrase in **v.7**, "***Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.***" That's what we need to know too. It is liberating. Peter wrote, "*Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.*" The preacher said to the shame-faced, fatherless boy, "*Now go claim your inheritance.*" That is what this passage invites us as Christians to do. **Here is what sets the people of God apart.**

- I. **THE LORD HAS FREED US FROM THE POWER THAT ENSLAVED US (11:1)**
- A. The supreme irony of this story is that Pharaoh, whose heart never softened, not only let Israel go, but **v.1** says, *he drove them out completely.* To put it another way: **God worked so powerfully that the Israelite slaves were forced by their masters to go free.** So who came out ahead on that deal?!

- B. Another part of God’s deliverance is that he did it by degrees. God had said to Pharaoh in **Ex 9:15**, *“By now I could have wiped you off the face of the earth with one swipe of my hand, but I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”* As we saw last week, through the plagues **God systematically dismantled and destroyed every power that enslaved his people.** The plagues did not only make Egypt miserable; they attacked and subdued Egypt’s gods.
- C. Here is our story as believers. Once God came to our aid through Christ Satan, loathe to ever let us go, could do nothing to keep us. You remember the stories in the New Testament of Jesus casting out the demons. He was systematically dismantling the powers of the Evil One, and proving to all that they must bow to his command. Satan, for all his lies and accusations and power, has nothing over you, because you as a Christian are hidden with Christ in God, and Christ is seated in a place high above Satan.
- D. Notice, too, that when God set Israel free they did not need to flee as prison escapees. They marched out like a conquering army leaving the field of battle. The Pharaoh and his leaders *begged* them to go. **12:31-33...**
You, dear brother or sister, never need to look over your shoulder as if the hounds of your past are about to track you down. God has set you free through Christ, finally and forever.
- E. Our Christian freedom is multifaceted. Remember **Ps. 103.**
*Praise the Lord, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit*

*and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Here is your freedom: you have no sin, however terrible or shameful, that is not forgiven. Your soul suffers no disease—no fear or sorrow or anger—that cannot be healed. The price has been paid so that you need never return to the pit of a prison that once held you. What's more, you are crowned—like holy royalty—with God's love and tender mercy. That is what people see in you now. And your desires, once infected and inflamed, are now satisfied by God with good things, so that your soul no longer ages and withers. David continues:

*The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.*

[Like the Israelites in Egypt, we were the oppressed]
*He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel....*

And now to us! Jesus said, *"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!"* So **go claim your inheritance!**

To me the most curious part of the Exodus story has always been this business of plundering the Egyptians. Look at **vv.2-3**... God had said the same thing back in **3:21-22**, *"You will not go empty-handed... Ask for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."* **All armies plunder their enemies but no other army plunders so politely as that!** It is an indication of how great God's victory was that Egypt so readily surrendered whatever Israel asked for just to see them go.

And remember: Israel never lifted a finger. Never uttered a threat. Never organized a protest. Never took up a weapon. What's more, Israel left Egypt as victors. They came out rejoicing, without a single casualty, while Egypt wailed over dead sons in every household. This victory was all God's!

The interesting thing is that Israel didn't really *need* Egypt's silver and gold, their fine clothing and jewels. What were they going to buy? Who would they need to pay? What good did it do them? As you will remember, all those treasures apparently ended up in one of two places. Either it was squandered in making the golden calf which Israel would worship, infuriating the LORD, or it was used in the building of the tabernacle. **The treasures of Egypt gave Israel something precious to give to God, the building materials for their worship.** I think the meaning of this part of the story is in that.

II. THE LORD PLUNDERS OUR PAST TO ENRICH OUR WORSHIP NOW (11:2-3)

- A. Think of this: As Christians we are not only rich in Christ; we are rich *at the expense of the devil*. He lost *us*, for starters. Christians build ministries out of the terrible things they've suffered. We bring a rich sympathy and grace others. Our testimonies and songs are golden with what we've taken from our former Captor. **Our worship and service of the Lord as Christians is always adorned with our testimonies of God's grace and power.**
- B. We are people who always have a *once, but now* kind of wealth. A spiritual rags to riches story. Paul wrote in **Col. 1**, "*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*" And in **Eph. 2**, "*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*" Peter wrote in **1 Pet 2**, "*Once you had not received mercy, but now have received mercy.*"

And it is that new-found reconciliation with God, that unblemished holiness and unassailable righteousness, that prodigal-welcomed-home story—that *mercy*—that fills our worship and makes us servants of the Lord.

Our past slavery—all that once held and shamed and impoverished us—is now plundered for the glory of God!
So go claim your inheritance!

Now we come to the dark night of this passage: vv.4-7... What word stands out there? **Firstborn**. Four times. Firstborn has two connotations: birth order and favor. Since I am the firstborn in my family I'm good with also being the favorite son. Usually, in the much of the world at least, those two things go together. The eldest son is the favored child. He gets the lion's share of the inheritance and he is the heir apparent to head up the family.

At the heart of this story is that God regarded Israel as his firstborn son. The whole nation. Turn back to **Ex. 4:21-23**. When God met Moses at the burning bush he prepped him for his future meetings with Pharaoh. Listen to what he said...

When the LORD speaks of Israel as his firstborn son, he isn't speaking of birth order. He is speaking of favor. Out of all the peoples of the earth God will bless, as a father blesses all his children, God favors Israel because they are the first people with whom he made his covenant. He speaks of Israel more than once as his *"treasured possession."* **Ps. 78** called Egypt's firstborn, *"the firstfruits of their strength."* That's what makes the firstborn especially precious. **Israel was the firstfruits of God's covenant love**, the first proof that he would bless all peoples.

So when the Pharaohs enslaved Israel and refused to let them go to worship and serve the LORD, they deprived God of his firstborn. **Egypt kidnapped God's firstborn and they were being raised by a harsh and wicked master as slaves, not as sons and daughters of the LORD.** They had never seen their home, never enjoyed their inheritance of peace and wealth, and had never been free to serve the God who loved them. **And the LORD wanted his firstborn back!** Nothing on earth is so criminal as keeping God's own people from serving him.

When God struck dead the firstborn of Egypt at the very midnight of their long history he made clear to Pharaoh and all his

people just what was at stake; just what the distinction was between Egypt and Israel. The LORD would not allow *his* beloved firstborn people to be the slaves of Egypt's firstborn.

III. THE LORD STOPPED AT NOTHING TO REDEEM HIS FIRSTBORN (11:4-7)

- A. Egypt did everything possible to befriend death. I doubt there is any culture that did more to deal with death than those Egyptians. I read that *"the Egyptians invested a larger portion of their wealth in the afterlife than any other culture in the history of the world. The Great Pyramids and the famous tombs in the Valley of the Kings stand as testimonies to their preoccupation with death and dying. To this day, there are mummies from ancient Egypt in museums all over the world. The god of the dead was Osiris, whose name meant 'The Mighty One; he who has sovereign power.' His assistant was Anubis, the god of the underworld" who is represented as a dog.* [Ryken, p.318] Did you notice that strange detail in **v.7**, *"But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any person or animal."* Perhaps it suggests that Anubis never saw death coming. I think that might also imply that the angel of death passed so silently over Israel that not even their watchdogs caught a whiff of his passing.
- B. God's plague killing all Egypt's firstborn proved how unprepared they really were. They could not befriend death. Their gods of death and the underworld were no match for the LORD, I AM. Do not remember Egypt's towering tombs, the pyramids. Remember their wailing in every house at the midnight of God's judgment.
- C. Meanwhile, there was not a whisper of death among God's people. Not because they faced no risk, but because God provided the protection of a sacrificed lamb, whose blood stained every doorway in Israel. Death came and went so silently that not even a dog barked. I wonder if anyone in Israel the next morning looked to heaven and

whispered, “Where, O death, is your sting? Where is your victory?”

The blood of Jesus, marking our lives, protects us even more mightily when death comes to our door.

- D. **Is. 43** was God’s word to his wayward people many centuries later. They were again prisoners, but this time because of their sin, yet God wanted them to know that he was still determined to rescue his firstborn. Listen to these familiar and precious verses: [**Is 43:1-13...**]

God gave the sons of Egypt in exchange for his people then but he has given his own Son, his true firstborn, his “only begotten Son,” in exchange for us. “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” Rom 8:31-32

- E. **Heb. 12:23** says that when we come to Christ we come “to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.” Thanks to Jesus Christ, we now are God’s firstborn. **So go claim your inheritance!**

Let me end by noting one other significant thing in **Ex. 11:8....** That is, of course, what happened the night of the dead sons.

Pharaoh’s officials *bowed down before Moses* and begged Israel to leave! They bowed before the humblest man on the face of the earth. They bowed before the man who carried nothing but his staff and the Word of the LORD. They bowed before the deliverer of Israel, who was himself a living prophecy of a greater Deliverer, Jesus Christ. We worship Jesus gladly right now. One day, *every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father*. And that, too, is our inheritance.

IV. WE SERVE THE LORD WHO WILL BRING ALL HIS ENEMIES TO THEIR KNEES (11:8)

- A. Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Jn 16:33. **1 Jn 5:4** says,

“everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” **So go claim your inheritance!**