

Introduction:

- A. I've said occasionally that Village Church is a congregation with a kind of amnesia. There are a lot of things that other churches know about their past that we don't know about ours. I know that next year we will mark our 40th anniversary, but I don't know when exactly. I've never seen a list of the charter members or heard about the day the first pastor, Paul Engle, started here. We don't know when the first child was dedicated or the first wedding or the first funeral. Someone in the past emptied all the file drawers and threw out all the records and now we don't know much about our history.
- B. But we know what matters. There are things that Christians must not forget or we will not know how to live; we will not know who we are. Our teacher in this is the book of Exodus, with its story of Israel's salvation from bondage and death in Egypt. Do you know that God spends more time in the Bible telling Israel the rituals for *remembering* what happened than actually telling them what happened? Why would God do that? Why doesn't God get down to the brass tacks of telling us how to handle stress or how to raise our kids or handle our jobs. Here's why: **Remembering our salvation well is crucial to our faith and behavior as Christians.**
- C. Turn to **Ex. 13**. Last Sunday we saw how God struck dead the firstborn sons of Egypt and how the Israelites immediately left the land of their bondage behind. They carried only their unleavened bread wrapped in their clothes and the plundered treasures of the vanquished Egyptians. **This is Israel's salvation story.** This is their testimony. Their calendar started over with this story. Our stories start over when Jesus' death and resurrection 2000 years ago is superimposed on the time in our own lives when we put our faith in him to save us. There is the end

of an era of bondage and the beginning of a new everlasting life of freedom and fellowship with God. Three enduring rituals are rooted in this story. We've already studied two of them: the Passover meal and the ensuing week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread. In our passage today God reiterates his command about the Feast of Unleavened Bread and adds his command about the consecration of Israel's firstborn sons. **Turn to Ex. 13.**

- D. The first 16 vss. of Ex 13 are all about remembering the ongoing meaning of Israel's exodus story. There's an interesting structure to the first 16 vvs. Look at it with me.
1. **Vv.1-2** introduce one other new tradition...
 2. Then **vv.3-10** reiterate the command to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread: **vv.3 & 10....**
 3. Then in **vv.11-16** we go back to the consecration of the firstborn, and it is almost a parallel to the verses before it. Both look ahead: **Vv.4-5 & 11-12a...** God is saying, ***When you enter into the God-blessed life and land I've promised you have to remember the lesson of the yeast.*** As Christians, that's where we live.
 4. Then both sections focus on using these practices to instruct the next generation: **vv.8-9 & 14-16...** Again, God is saying, ***When you enter into the God-blessed life and land I've promised you have to remember that you belong exclusively and completely to me.*** That's for us.
- E. So why should we invest time looking at these verses when we have so many spiritual needs; when so many things would be more practical? Because so many of our problems in life arise when we let the yeast of the world we have left behind permeate our lives. And because so many things go wrong in our lives when we forget that we are not our own; that we were bought with a price. **In the Christian life and in our church, how well we remember what God has done determines how well we live now.**

I. ALWAYS REMEMBER HOW QUICKLY AND COMPLETELY GOD DELIVERED US FROM SLAVERY (13:3-10)

- A. V.3... Note that phrase, “*the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand.*” I found 24 times when that phrase, “a mighty hand,” is used in the OT, and all of them look back to the Exodus. Sometimes the phrase is “*a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.*” When I think of this phrase I think how a strong man might say, “*I can whip him with one hand tied behind my back.*” God batted down the demonic gods of Egypt one-handed. One-handed he bloodied the Nile, unleashed everything from gnats to hail, extinguished the sun god, Re, for three days, and then his mighty hand brought death to the firstborn in every household, an utterly devastating defeat.

But God had not yet displayed the full extent of his might. **How mighty the hand** that stopped the downward plunge of history in its tracks. **How mighty the hand** that brought the dawn of hope to those walking in darkness. **How mighty the hand** that seized the sin of the world and pulled it into his dying body. **How mighty the hand** that dealt the grave a death blow. **How mighty the hand** whose touch makes the blind see and the lame walk and the deaf hear; that sets prisoners free and makes beggars the Bride of Christ. **How mighty the hand** that will lift the dead from their graves to meet the Lord in the air. **How mighty the hand** that will banish Satan and all his army of evil forever to lake of burning fire. And **how mighty the hand** that will settle us, the living city of God, in a new heavens and new earth where there will never again be pain or tears.

- B. God established a week-long annual festival so his people would always remember how sudden and thorough their salvation was. A week to rest and to celebrate and to feast. But this one hard-and-fast rule: *no yeast anywhere.* V.6... So you remember how quickly we left slavery and so we remember not to let any of the old Egypt into our lives

now. Not a speck of slavery or old gods or other kings. Let's remember that we are to keep our lives as free from sin as our bread is free from yeast.

Illus.: On three separate occasions in two days this week I was a real pain in the neck. In a word, I was unkind. In fact, unkindness was getting into my system. I didn't know where it would show up next or who it would hurt. I was sad and sorry so I sat down to pray. I thought about **Phil 2:3** that tells me, *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit."* And I thought about the yeast and the verses we looked at a couple weeks ago in **1 Cor 5:8**, *"Therefore let us keep the Festival [of Unleavened Bread], not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."* I confessed my sin and I told God I couldn't clean house by myself; that I needed him to help me get rid of that fermenting puffery that was beginning to permeate my heart. I prayed for "sincerity and truth."

- C. **V.10...** The Christian version of this is Communion, when we eat the unleavened bread that tastes of Jesus' body broken for us. But it is also to be our unending practice to get the yeast out of our lives and to be nourished on the life of Christ.

Now let's look at this business of the firstborn sons: vv.12-13... A key statement in Exodus is in **4:22-23** when God was prepping Moses: *"Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: **Israel is my firstborn son**, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.'"* The language of the *firstborn* is all over the first five books, the Torah. Over 50 times. But this statement, "Israel is my firstborn son," is at the root of them all. This is what stands behind God's law about the dedicating the firstborn sons.

The point of being God's firstborn has nothing to do with being born first. Israel was God's firstborn because they were the

first people on whom God fixed his favor and blessing, and he did that simply because he loved them. In fact, all of God's best blessings to anyone else in the world come through Israel.

I'm sure you noticed the word *redeem* in v.13... That word always reminds us of a sacrifice for sin but I don't think that's the point here. (Some would disagree with me.) The issue here isn't sin. It is simply that God has a claim on Israel's firstborn males as a kind of down payment on his ownership of the nation. The firstborn from flocks and herds of cattle *were* killed. That's an expensive proposition for herders and farmers. But that made vivid to Israel that when God said he owned them he meant to be taken literally. No one else can have what belongs to God. Just ask Pharaoh.

Sons, however, could be redeemed from being sacrificed. They could be bought back from the Lord and brought back to life with his family. Do you remember how Jesus' parents did this? It says in **Lk 2:22-24**, *"When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons.'"* We often read what Mary and Joseph did as the backdrop to why we dedicate our children to God. The point isn't only that our children belong to God but that we all do. Israel's firstborn sons were stand-ins for the whole nation.

For us as Christians today, I'd sum up this way:

- II. ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT YOU BELONG COMPLETELY TO THE LORD (13:1-2, 11-16)**
- A. Perhaps you noticed that in both of these rituals the fathers were to tell their *son* why it was done. The son had a vested interest. He was entrusted with passing on this tradition, and he was the one whose life had been spared.
 - B. We as Christians do this also. We dedicate our children to the Lord, and as well as we can we mean it when we say, "I

- give you this, my precious child.*” Godly parents will say this again and again as the years pass. When they are sick or struggling or far off, we give and *re-give* them to God.
- C. We do the same for ourselves. Part of our Christian life is *re-giving* ourselves to God. I remember reading years ago, *“The problem with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar.”* When trouble and temptation pulls us away from Jesus, the Holy Spirit whispers to us, *“Remember, you were bought with a price. You are not your own. Glorify God in your body.”*
- D. Illus.: In the book I wrote, *Pastoral Graces*, I tell about my first child dedication.

Matt was my first child dedication, some thirty years ago now. I wrote earlier that since I started carrying babies through the congregation for their blessing I had never had one cry. But that first time, the little guy went berserk there on the platform in front of God and everybody. Screamed and twisted so that all I could do was put my hand on his head and try to pray loudly enough to be heard over his bawling. His life has been kind of like that, from what his parents tell me. But the good work God began that day is far closer to completion. Matt, who wandered far, has come home from the far country, married a wonderful Christian woman, and despite dropping out of high school, now has a masters degree. The baby who didn’t want to be dedicated to Christ is now His growing disciple and father of two little ones of his own. [p.140]

Conclusion

Back in **Ex. 13** the same phrase is repeated verbatim after each command (**v.9 & 16**): *“It will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand.”* This is why you see orthodox Jews wearing little phylacteries on their temples and wrists. But that’s not really the point. *“A sign on your hand”* is something *you* see all the time.

Imagine a tattoo on the back of one hand that said, “No yeast!” and on the back of the other hand that said, “You belong to the LORD!” It would be hard to forget those things!

“A symbol on your forehead” is there for *other people* to see when they look at you. You don’t see it; they do. When other people get up close enough to see and know you and me they should see as clearly as if we had a sign on our foreheads, *I live free of bondage, and I belong to the LORD.*

The orthodox Jews call those little leather boxes which they wear on their arms and heads the Tefellin. Inside is a tiny parchment with words from the Torah handwritten in special ink by a scribe. And these very verses—Ex. 13:1-10, and 11-16 are two of the four that are carried so that the person who wears them never forgets what God said.

Whatever else you remember—your anniversary or your kids’ birthdays or the day you graduated, and whatever else our church remembers—never forget that we are to be a holy people—yeastless. And never forget that we belong to the Lord.