

Introduction:

- A. I came across this intriguing statement by **Dr. Clair Davis**, a church historian. He said the Christian life is “*a combination of amnesia and déjà vu.*” We say, “*I know I’ve forgotten this before.*” [Ryken, p.335] **At the heart of our Christian faith is a story we must never forget, for if we do, we will forget who we are.** Our Christian story of salvation through Christ’s death on the cross has a prequel in Israel’s rescue from Egypt.
- B. We’ve been studying the book of Exodus. Turn to **Ex. 12**. Last week in ch. 11 we saw Moses’ and Pharaoh’s last angry confrontation and the LORD’s solemn alert that all the firstborn sons of Egypt would die because they would not release the LORD’s firstborn, Israel. Today we look at the story from Israel’s side—what they heard and did and how God instructed them to always remember what happened. Evidently, the final plague did not come immediately. Israel was given some days to prepare properly while I assume the Egyptians were given one more opportunity to repent. Which, of course, they never did.
- C. We’re studying this passage to help us be better disciples of Jesus. This helps us remember our story and see it with fresh eyes. It is déjà vu, and it restores our amnesiac memories.
- I. REMEMBER THAT PREPARING FOR GOD’S RESCUE WAS NOTHING LIKE YOU WOULD EXPECT (12:1-13)**
- A. To begin with, we had to get new calendars (vv.1-3). The Jews followed the 28-day lunar calendar. In effect, God gave them a new January, *Aviv*, which to this day begins in late March or early April. This was the month of their salvation, the month they became free people. And on the 14th night, when the moon was full, they would be saved from death and set free from slavery. This would be their Independence Day and their Memorial Day.

- B. The secret to God's salvation, it turns out, is the lamb (vv.3-7). This is nothing like the Minutemen in Lexington and Concord mustering out in the middle of the night. This is nothing like the wink and nod planning of a prison break. This is nothing like the making of a medical miracle with its tests and IVs and waiting rooms. **To be saved by God you just have just the right lamb.**
1. The lamb must be equivalent to the need of the family. Isn't that interesting? No leftovers and if there are, burn them all up. No need for Tupperware here! Can you imagine the mother asking each one, "How much do you think you will eat?" and the father looking over his herd to find a perfect lamb just right for their family.
 2. This lamb was brought into the family for four days. I can't think of any good reason to do that except that God wanted them to form an attachment. Farm families do not look at the slaughter of one of their animals the same way city people may, but neither are they unfeeling. *This* lamb would die for them.
 3. The lamb was to be perfect (v.5). A year-old without defect. Normally that would be the lamb you want to keep because in time it would produce other lambs without defects. But this was a sacrifice to God so it needed to be perfect.
 4. What was most important was the lamb's blood (v.6-7). The Bible says that *life is in the blood*. This was an exchange; a substitute. God would accept the blood of this lamb *instead of* the death of the firstborn. That blood on the doorways of Israelite homes was like a security system protecting those inside from death.
 5. Every household required the blood of a lamb. This whole experience was shared by God's people. Each household chose and cared for a lamb. Each household slaughtered that lamb at the same time on the 14th

day. Each spread the blood on the doorposts. Each stayed inside and ate the strange feast. No exceptions. This is what bonds the people of God. Here is the heart of their heritage.

- C. God's people prepared for God's rescue through taste and haste (vv.8-11). This was the strangest feast you've ever heard of. I assume that **lamb**, a delicacy, was not typically roasted this way—with its head and legs and internal organs. But it was very important that the entire lamb be sacrificed and eaten. The lamb's blood protected them and the lamb's body nourished them.

And who has **bitter herbs** in a feast? Bitter doesn't taste good. In the contemporary Passover those are represented by horseradish. Not in a sauce to tone down the flavor. Straight up. One small taste makes people wince. Why eat this: so that they would remember how bitter their bondage to Egypt had been. This was the taste of slavery. Then there's the **bread made without yeast**. It is palatable, to be sure, but it is certainly not tasty—not the stuff of feasts. Nothing at all like Swedish rye or pumpernickel or Italian bread. Matzah is flat and pretty tasteless, a come-down for bread lovers.

Then there's this matter of **eating in haste**—the way people do at an airport when their flight has been called just as they get their sandwich. They were to dress for the road, not for the table. Can you picture them trying to recline at table with their heavy cloaks and walking sandals on. And dad with his staff in his hand. It would be a little like eating while holding your car keys.

And strangest of all, it was **a feast—a celebration of freedom—even as death passed over them**, devastating their enemies but sparing them because of the lamb's blood on their doors. Who eats a feast at a time like that? *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies."*

- D. Israel was to do all those things exactly that way but when it comes to saving his people, God does all the work (vv.12-13). God told them how to protect themselves, how to nourish themselves, and how to be prepared for freedom. But God did the work. On the 14th night of the first month, when the full moon was high, God lived up to his name: *“I am the LORD. I AM THE I AM.”* After multiple warnings, plagues and mercies, God devastated the Egyptians with the death of their firstborn sons and he utterly discredited the Egyptian gods who could put up no resistance to the LORD. And in that same night the LORD saw the blood of the lamb on Israelite doorways as he and his destroying angel passed over. Wailing arose from every house in Egypt while the sounds of freedom’s feast came from every house in Israel.
- E. And God said to Israel, “The blood will be a sign for you.” God saw the blood but it was a sign for Israel. That is, it pointed to something else—something greater to come. This blood is more than it seems. It has a story to tell. It is a prophet. The blood of the lamb pointed to Jesus Christ.

In the sequence of things here, God told Pharaoh, through Moses, what was going to happen in ch.11. Then he told the Israelites how they were to prepare and reiterated again what was going to happen.

Now he does one other thing: God tells Israel how they are to commemorate this night in the years to come. They didn’t do this that first year, but they were to do it every year after that: **v.14...**

And when God has made that clear, then the plague strikes and Egypt finally lets God’s people go. Today as Christians, we no longer observe these particular ceremonies but they are embedded in our faith and in our own universal Christian observance—Communion. But here’s what we can take from this:

II. REMEMBER HOW GOD’S RESCUE SETS US APART (12:14-28)

- A. In the next verses God establishes the Feast of Unleavened Bread (. It is a kind of paradox. What kind of feast is built around unleavened bread?! Seems to me that’s not far from having a banquet of rice cakes!
- B. Bread is a very important symbol in the Bible. Remember the manna that appeared in the wilderness—bread from heaven. There was a table of bread in the tabernacle. And Jesus, of course, called himself the Bread of Life. In Communion we, by sharing in one loaf (so to speak) remember our union with one another and Jesus, and Jesus told us the bread of Communion was his body, broken for us. Bread is a big deal in the Bible.

But what is striking about *this* bread is what it is *not*. It is *not* leavened. It does *not* have yeast. And therein lies its importance. Biologically speaking, yeast is a fungus. It is living. It makes bread rise or puts bubbles in beer because it produces a carbon dioxide gas. It makes bread (and I assume, beer) taste better.

One thing about yeast is that it has a life of its own. Long before those little yeast packets, a woman would make her bread and pull off a little lump before she baked it. She’d put that little lump in the next day’s bread and the yeast would spread. Yeast has a life of its own.

Yeast also has its dark side. Yeast is why things ferment, why bread gets moldy. Give it a few days and it will turn on you.

- C. Listen to how strongly God stresses his rules regarding this feast: **vv.15-20**... Four times he says, “*No yeast! Not a speck anywhere!*” and two times he says, “*If anyone is found with yeast, they’re no longer Israelites. Cut them off.*” This is very serious business. But why? Why was it so important to purge the nation of yeast? Two reasons:
1. **On the Passover night the Israelites baked bread without leaven because they were leaving Egypt and**

they needed bread that wouldn't spoil on the way.

Unleavened bread was the food of pilgrims, of people walking with God; the food of the way home. And Israel was to never forget that.

2. **While the symbolism of yeast is not explained here, it isn't hard to figure out.** Israel was to always remember that they'd made a clean break with the spoiling, fermenting, pervasive sins of Egypt. And that symbolism carries down to us. There is in our past, and in our old natures, and in our culture a pervasive and dangerous yeast that can spoil our Christian lives. Paul wrote in **1 Cor 5:6-8**, "*Your boasting is not good.*" The Corinthians were boasting about how spiritual they were while at the same time they were condoning despicable sexual sin in their congregation. That is what was spreading, yeast-like, through their church. So Paul continues: *Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*" We are to keep this Festival of Unleavened Bread all the time in our own lives. We are to be constantly on our toes to get rid of the yeast that ruins not only our own lives but our church as well.

- D. There is another part of that Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was a week off! No work for a week. Don't even think about. You can prepare food but that's it. Every year, stop and rest and remember what it is like *not* to be slaves. This is our birthright in Christ. Jesus said, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* Jesus is our Sabbath. He sets our souls free from slavery and striving.

- E. So in **vv.21-23** the wheels are finally set in motion. The plague of death upon the firstborn is at hand... [**vv.21-23**]. But now again, God points Israel to the future—to what they will do year after year, generation after generation, to remember this night: **vv.24-28**...

Not only was Israel to mark that entire week with their Feast of Unleavened Bread, but they were to always remember that Passover night with the sacrifice of a lamb. This is made clearer and more specific in **Deut. 16**, but you see it in v.24 here: *“Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance.”* And in **v.27** this is described as *“the Passover sacrifice”* which children of every succeeding Israelite generation were to see.

At the heart of our faith is that a lamb was killed in our place and that Lamb’s blood satisfied God’s justice. That memory remains at the heart of our Christian faith—and is reiterated and remembered and relished every time we take Communion.

Whatever else we pass on to our children, and to the believers who follow us, there must be this: Jesus died for our sins and rose again to give us life, so we can walk in purity as we follow him.

Conclusion

At Jesus’ Last Supper, according to **Luke 22:14-16**, *“When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat **this Passover** with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again **until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.**’”* The Passover brought to its essentials in Christian Communion is our national meal and a divine promise we can taste.