

DEVOTIONAL 13



GOD IN OUR MIDST

EXODUS

This week we conclude our look at Exodus by reviewing the journey from slavery to freedom, from being under the cloud of the Egyptians to having the cloud of God's presence in the midst of the people. For the New Testament Christian, Exodus is a window into our own journey through the cross to glory.

DAY 1

Exodus 2:23–25

²³ During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. ²⁴ And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵ God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

Exodus 19:1–6

¹ On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ² They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, ³ while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Have you ever asked out loud or in the quietness of your thoughts, *God, are you watching what is going on? Do you see?* The Israelites, groaning while slaves in Egypt, were certainly wondering this on a daily basis, maybe even by the hour. God reassures his people that he sees, that he knows. His covenant, a bond so deep by a God so steadfast, cannot be broken. When we groan, God sees his creation—a new creation in Christ.

Throughout this series in Exodus, which has spanned multiple summers and has touched on many aspects of humanity, creation, and God, one thing has really stood out—God’s presence and care. We see here in Exodus 2 and 19 that God was intimately involved in the lives of Israel. He knew. It may not have seemed like that from the Israelites’ perspective when they were slaves in Egypt, daily wondering how they got into this mess. Certainly it was easier to feel and experience that presence when God led them with the pillar of smoke and fire, or when God’s presence dwelt on Mount Sinai—though the golden calf incident leaves us wondering.

Have there been times in your life when you have wondered if God was paying attention to your life? Have you ever desired a physical manifestation of God's presence, assuming that would help? I know I have. From time to time, I would settle for a pillar of smoke or fire to lead me, or for Jesus to come and help me navigate life. While I intellectually know that God is with me (Psalm 139:7-12) and that my life in Christ as a son or daughter (Galatians 3:26-4:7) means that he works through, around, and in me on a daily basis, it sure would be awesome to have that physical presence. Or would it? The Israelites had the presence of God in the ark in the tabernacle and the temple, and yet they still stumbled, didn't fully trust, and certainly went astray.

What we need is a reminder of the gospel. A reminder that Jesus, our King, made it possible for us to be viewed as new creations, that even though we groan, our groaning is not that of hopelessness or despair but of eager anticipation of our King's return. He will return to deliver the final blow to the evil one; to wipe away sin, fear, death, and our very groaning and replace it with joy, love, peace, and fullness that we can only imagine.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, oh how we feel the pangs of this world, whether through personal experience or through watching the world around us. Would you remind us of your great love and mercy and the truth that you see us as new creations because of the faithfulness, love, life, and death of King Jesus. Would you answer our groaning as you always have, through steadfast covenant relationship. Give us the discernment and wisdom, Lord, to know that you care and that you are always with us. In Jesus our King's name, we pray. Amen.

DAY 2

Exodus 12:1-13; 21-23

¹ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ² “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. ⁴ 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. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, ⁶ 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.

⁷ “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. ⁸ They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰ And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹ 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. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign 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.

Exodus 12:21-23

²¹ Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Pass-over lamb. ²² Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. ²³ For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you:

Read through all of the verses above. For today's devotional, we'll spend time in prayer and meditation, using Exodus 12.

Dear Father, the plagues and exodus were so significant for Israel's identity that the month they came out of Egypt became for them the first month of the year. Give us that same sense, with school, programs and rhythms starting anew. We dedicate this year to you, wherever you will lead. You are powerful and you are for us.

-Pause to reflect-

Father, the people of Israel were instructed that each household was to choose one lamb or goat without blemish. So for each household, either the firstborn son or a lamb would die. We see also that the community cared for each other and small households could join and be represented by one lamb together. The entire nation was then to kill their chosen animal at twilight. It's hard to fathom what that twilight must have been like, when all the lambs and goats were slaughtered at the same time. It would have been messy, smelly, loud, and scary. May this account help us comprehend the weight of our sin, and how it divides us from you, who are holy. May we also see how to care for each other, especially for those of us who are single or in small households.

-Pause to reflect-

Lamb of God, you who are the fulfillment of all these lambs and goats who were sacrificed, we worship you. You told the people to put the blood of the lambs and goats on their door frames. When you saw the blood you would pass by that house and all would be safe. You set the people apart by having them eat the unleavened bread and meat in haste, ready to follow you. There needed to be enough people to eat the entire animal, an act of consecration. May we treasure this difficult, beautiful mystery, and sing with Isaac Watts:

Not all the blood of beasts
on Jewish altars slain,
could give the guilty conscience peace,
or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb,
takes all our sins away,
a sacrifice of nobler name
and richer blood than they.

My faith would lay her hand
on that dear head of thine,
while like a penitent I stand,
and there confess my sin.

My soul looks back to see
the burdens thou didst bear,
when hanging on the cursed tree,
and knows her guilt was there.

Believing, we rejoice
to see the curse remove;
we bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
and sing his bleeding love.

-Pause to reflect-

Father, the people dipped hyssop in basins to put the blood on their door frames. In Leviticus and Numbers hyssop was part of what was used to cleanse someone who had leprosy or who had touched a dead body. When David was repenting of his sin of adultery and murder he begged to be cleansed with hyssop. The hyssop branch was used to transfer the blood of the sacrifice to the sinner. So it's with wonder and amazement that we read John 19:28-30:

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

There is Jesus, our Lamb, drinking from a hyssop branch, in his final act of love, obedience, substitution, atonement, strength, and cleansing. Jesus, you are amazing. Fill us our hearts with love of you today.

-Pause to reflect-

Amen.

DAY 3

Exodus 14:10–14

¹⁰ When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. ¹¹ They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” ¹³ And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴ The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

Satan’s rebellion before the creation of the world meant that all history would be an unfolding drama of kingdoms in conflict. Satan could believe God spoke truth, and even have an emotional reaction to it (James 2:19), but he would not bow. An exalted position among the angels was not acceptable; he would be God or nothing. He continued his rebellion by targeting men and women created in God’s image. When Adam and Eve fell, Satan became the prince of this world, ruling by deception, malice, and oppression. Christ’s victory on the cross disarmed him, but did not destroy him, and he continues to work through principalities and powers using human agents.

Pharaoh was one of the human agents in Satan’s kingdom of darkness. In God’s providence, Jacob’s family came to Egypt under Joseph and were set apart in Goshen where God kept his promise to multiply them into a great nation. Living in Goshen where they experienced protection and provision likely kept them from seeing Egypt as an evil kingdom, a place of death. But God’s redemption plan was moving forward! It was time for Israel to know and trust their God. So God used suffering to bring them to truth until they were ready to leave their familiar surroundings and follow him to an unseen Promised Land. He knew that they needed the plagues as much as the Egyptians did. They needed to see the gods they knew defeated, one by one. God’s final triumph came when the angel of death destroyed the firstborns of Egypt, but passed over every household marked by blood. This God is Lord of all!

God knew this collection of slaves was not ready for the battles required to claim the Promised Land. He knew they would need a wilderness journey where they would learn to trust him by being tested again and again. God knew that their slavery was not just a legal or social status, but an identity. A slave is a possession before being a person; he is the property of his master. Years spent in slavery can produce a learned powerlessness, bitter resentments, and an inability to trust. Transforming slaves into free men and women would take a long process of life experiences until new habits of thinking and acting could be formed.

The first test came quickly when a hardened Pharaoh pursued. Satan is committed to destroying God’s plan and people and does not give up easily. The people responded out of their slave mentality—fear of an evil master. They forgot the amazing deliverance they had so recently experienced, and attributed evil motives to God by accusing Moses.

But like a patient, loving parent, Moses did not reprimand them for their lack of faith; he answered their fears by reminding them of who God is. Salvation is from the Lord! He is the Deliverer who will fight for you! You will never see the Egyptians again that you fear so much. But Moses also told the Israelites what God expected of them. He named four things: put away fear, stand firm, be silent, and pay attention. See and recognize who God is and what he is doing. It was a hard test, but the Israelites listened to Moses and saw the salvation of the Lord that day. *“Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.”* (Ex.14:31)

Can you see yourself in this salvation portrait? Can you see us, a community of God’s people at Christ Church, on our journey from slavery to freedom? God knows and loves us as he knew and loved his people long ago. He knows the fears that dominate and paralyze us, and asks us to be still and know that he is God. Through the cross and resurrection, we have been delivered from the dominion of sin and Satan and transferred to a new kingdom and Master. Be encouraged! The gates of hell cannot stand against the advancing kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ!

PRAYER

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, for it has found us in our slavery to sin and bought our freedom. Lord, we have been through dangers, trials, and fears and we are trusting you to get us home. Show us how to be still, how to trust you in our tests, and how to praise you, for you are our first love. Amen

DAY 4

Exodus 34:4–9

⁴ So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. ⁵ The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. ⁶ The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” ⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. ⁹ And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

As we continue to rewind the Exodus story this week, heading for the glory of YHWH in the midst of Israel, we need to stop one more time at this marvelous passage in Exodus 34. Here we see the heart of God displayed against the backdrop of horrible sin that was threatening to splinter the relationship of God with his people; a heart that is full of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. As we have noted before, this self-revelation of God is picked up over and over again throughout the Scriptures (e.g. Neh. 9:17, 31; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; Jonah 4:2; Joel 2:13). The frequency with which the biblical writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, come back to this statement is instructive for us. Do we have his name emblazoned on our hearts? Do we repeat it with frequency?

There are a couple of other details in Exodus 34 worth noting. Here we see God come down to stand with Moses and declare his name. In his intercession for the people of Israel, Moses has laid himself on the line (cf. 32:32). Into this vulnerable place, God comes and stands with Moses. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah is in a similarly vulnerable place. God takes him to Sinai, puts him in the cleft of a rock, and stands with him in the still small voice. In both cases, God very tenderly affirms to his servants that he is with them. He affirms that he has not asked them to do something that he will not also accompany them in doing. As his servant, God has called you to bear his name in the world. Be encouraged that he stands with you no matter how vulnerable you may feel.

Finally, note how Moses responds in Exodus 34:8: “And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.” Following Jesus—the practice of discipleship—begins with worship. May we always start with worship. Our journey to glory will take care of itself as long as we keep our eyes on Jesus and our heart bowed before him.

PRAYER

Father, we praise you that you reveal yourself to the vulnerable and needy. Even in the midst of sin that threatens to sever our relationship, we hear your voice proclaiming yourself to be merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness! We are not like this. All praise to you! Holy Spirit, fill our hearts today with these realities. Grow a love for you within us that drives out other illicit or less fulfilling loves. Renew our calling to be your servants, proclaiming your excellencies to a hurting world. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

DAY 5

Exodus 40:34–38

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁶ Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷ But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸ For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

When the book of Exodus opens, God's people are living under a cloud of darkness. J.A. Motyer in his commentary on Exodus puts it this way: *"The dark shadow of enslavement lay upon the people of God, the bitter cry of bereavement as their sons were snatched from them for the river, the blows of the taskmaster, a future without hope, and the relentless, uncaring policy of genocide. They were at that time a people under a cloud, even if the text does not expressly say so."* (The Message of Exodus, 325, 326). As the book comes to a close, another cloud moves into place. This time, though, it is the cloud of glory, the very presence of the Lord in the midst of his people.

It has been quite a journey for YHWH with his stiff-necked people. But the steadfast, ever-forgiving, ever-pursuing God has fulfilled his promises and moved in the very heart of the Israelite camp. Textually, there is an eagerness to the Lord's filling that doesn't come across so clearly in the English translation. In Hebrew, there is no "then" in the beginning of v. 34, just immediate movement from the completion of the tabernacle in v. 33 to the filling of the tabernacle in v. 34. It's as if God couldn't wait to be in the midst of his people! I wonder how often we miss this aspect of God? How often do we think of him as eager to be in the midst of his people?

Not only is he eager for this presence, but he is also faithful to guide his people. This same cloud, along with the pillar of fire, guides his people safely through the wilderness. The people never even need to ask; they simply need to wait on the Lord. God is the same, yesterday, today and forever, still guiding his people through the wilderness. This we can count on!

Finally, like any good series (Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, Harry Potter, etc...), Exodus comes to the close of its episode with a bit of a cliffhanger. Moses, surprisingly, is kept out of the tabernacle by the cloud (v. 35). On the one hand, this is a picture of the totality of YHWH's filling. When the Lord extends himself to fill an area, there is no room for anyone or anything else. Unless, that is, the Lord makes a way. This is the point of the book of Leviticus, the next episode in the series. In the book of Leviticus, Moses will be invited into the presence of the Lord through the efficacy of sacrifice. If Exodus points us to the work of Christ taking residence among us in his Incarnation and eventually through the Holy Spirit, Leviticus reminds us that this presence will require the blood of a lamb. Praise God for the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world!

PRAYER

Great God of our Fathers, as we close the book of Exodus, we thank you for the story of rescue, for moving us from darkness to light. We thank you for your eagerness to be in the midst of your people. We thank you for your continued guidance along the way. Most of all, we thank you for Jesus, the fulfillment of all these OT pictures. He is both the one who tabernacles among us and opens the way by his sacrifice to the inner sanctuary. Holy Spirit, we pray that the finished work of the Savior would become ever dearer to us and that your glory would be evident in our lives. In Jesus' strong name, we pray. Amen.