

Escape

By Brad Allison on 8/3/2003

Scripture Reference *Exodus 12*

We come today to the story of the Passover. This story forms not only the climax of the Exodus narrative, but it is also the central historical fact in all of Judaism. And since the New Testament identifies Jesus as the Passover lamb, this story becomes the heart of Christianity as well. Notice the central part it has in the chapter where it appears. Chapter 12 is a long chapter, but the central story only takes four verses (29-32). Everything before that and after that is God's instruction for how they are to observe the main events of Passover throughout their history. Even before it happens, God tells them what he's going to do and that they need to place the celebration of this event in their worship practices throughout their history as a nation. Then after it happens, he tells them what he has done and reminds them again to incorporate this within their worship. God's chief concern here seems to be that his people always keep the Passover central.

The Christian form of the Passover should always be the central part of our Christianity. But it's easy to lose our center as Christians, to become like a schoolteacher I know who told me once that his job would be great if it weren't for all those bothersome children he had to teach. A teacher who gets more excited about lesson preparations, faculty meetings and bulletin board design than about making a difference in the life of a student has lost his center. The same thing happens so easily when Christians forget this central story.

Illustration: I was reading a story this week about the 19th century missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson. Missionaries in that day didn't take furlough years, but stayed on the field for decades. During that time, they also had much less opportunity for communication than today's missionaries with e-mail. So when Judson returned to America after thirty years in Burma, many wanted to hear more about his missionary adventures. On one particular night shortly after his return to America, a large crowd had gathered to hear him speak, many having come from great distances. He spoke for about fifteen minutes, with much passion, and centered his comments on Jesus. On the ride home, a traveling companion said to him, "The people were very much disappointed; they wanted you to talk of something else."

"What did they want?" Judson inquired. "I presented, to the best of my ability, the most interesting subject in the world."

"But they wanted something different, a story."

"Well, I am sure I gave them a story—the most thrilling one that can be conceived of."

"But," his friend replied, "they had heard it before. They wanted something new of a man who had just come from the antipodes."

"Then I am glad they have it to say," concluded Judson, "that a man coming from the antipodes had nothing better to tell than the wondrous story of the dying love of Jesus. My business is to preach the gospel of Christ; and when I can speak at all, I dare not trifle with my commission. When I looked upon those people today, and remembering where I should next meet them, how could I stand up and furnish food to vain curiosity—tickle their fancy with amusing stories, however decently strung together on a thread of religion? That is not what Christ meant by preaching the gospel."

Like Judson's audience, we often forget this central story of our escape from bondage and condemnation. Instead of putting it at the center, we focus on peripheral issues. Did you know that the most common first two words of books that sell in Christian bookstores are the words "How to..." How to have a great quiet time, a good marriage, well-behaved children. It is easy to lose the center in the midst of these things. So God calls us back through the retelling of this story, a story about escape from bondage and judgment. I want us to look at it today by

focusing on the need for escape, the means of escape and the result of escape. What do we escape from, how do we escape, and how do we know that we have escaped?

I. The Need for Escape

It's clear in the story of the Passover that the greatest need for escape wasn't a need to escape Egypt, but the need to escape the judgment of God. God sent his avenging angel to take the life of the firstborn in every family, including even the animals. Why the firstborn? Why not another family member? Because in the biblical culture, the firstborn male represented all the future hopes of the family. That was the case in all of the cultures of this day, including the Egyptian. What this signifies is that these families all have a debt that is owed to God, and God is here laying claim to that debt. In other words, this is a preview of the great judgment of the future.

One of the common objections people sometimes have to this idea of God's universal judgment is that people don't think they have done much to deserve such a thing. As a neighbor of mine once said to me after I asked him about his eternal soul, "I'm the nicest guy I know, and if God doesn't want to be with me for eternity, then I don't want to be with him either." Tim Keller gives a helpful illustration in answer to this. He asks us to imagine someone with a special tape recorder hung around the neck. This tape recorder is only activated when a person makes a statement that begins with words like, "People should or shouldn't..." and then goes on to give a law of behavior. Then at the end of our lives, we are only judged by our own laws and not God's. Is there anyone who could stand up under such a judgment? We couldn't even pass a judgment where the standard is our own laws, much less a judgment in which God's laws are the standard.

II. The Means of Escape

This destroying angel passed through the most powerful nation of the earth like a tank through high weeds, bringing universal death and destruction. There was only one thing powerful enough to stop it—a lamb. God told his people to take a one-year old lamb without blemish and apply the blood of the lamb to the doorpost in the form of a cross, on each of the side doorposts and on the lintel above the door. And God said, "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" (v. 13). This teaches us that the means of escape is nothing *but* the blood, and nothing *with* the blood.

When God sees the blood, he passes over. Nothing *but* the blood will save. Suppose an Israelite would have thought such a practice as sprinkling blood on the doorposts too messy and unseemly. "Better to adorn it with something attractive like my gold and silver," he thinks. But such an attitude, no matter how much sense it makes, would have had tragic consequences. Nothing but the blood of the lamb would be able to protect against the destroying angel. Why is it that only the blood of the lamb provides such protection? Because of the principle of substitution. This passage looks ahead to a very widespread teaching in the Bible called the substitutionary death of Christ. When Jesus died as the lamb of God, he died as our substitute, taking our place. He died the death we should have died. In every home throughout Egypt that night, there was either a dead son or a dead lamb. The blood of the lamb was an acceptable substitute for God's justice. The blood of God's lamb, Jesus, is an acceptable substitute for our blood.

Illustration: The story is told of a duck hunter who was with a friend in the wide-open land

of southeastern Georgia. Far away on the horizon he noticed a cloud of smoke, and before long he could hear crackling as the wind shifted. He realized the terrible truth: a brushfire was advancing, and it was coming so fast that they wouldn't be able to outrun it. After thinking quickly, the hunter began searching through his pockets until he found what he was looking for—a book of matches. He struck one and used it to light a small fire around the two of them. Soon they were standing in a circle of blackened earth, waiting for the fire to come. They didn't have long to wait. As it approached, they covered their mouths with handkerchiefs and braced themselves. The fire came near—and swept over them. They were completely unhurt, untouched. Fire would not pass where fire had already passed. Those who trust in the blood stand in the burned over place, and are protected there. Jesus has been burned in our place. There we huddle and find safety.

Not only is it that nothing *but* the blood allows escape from the avenging angel, but it is also the case that nothing *with* the blood provides for our safety. Some might think that if they were to help God out by hanging some family heirloom on the door with the blood, that God would be more likely to pass over that house. Perhaps you think that if you can hang a string of faithful daily Bible reading and prayer with the blood, that God will be more likely to pass over. No, the blood is sufficient all by itself. The blood covers our sin and protects from the just judgment of God. It is sufficient for all kinds of sinners. It was sufficient for the one who had earlier in the story struck and killed one of his countrymen and then asked Moses, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us?” (2:14). It was sufficient for those who later would fall into idolatry and worship the golden calf. The blood of Christ really does deliver from all sin.

This helps clarify a matter that confuses so many today. It is not the strength or sincerity of our faith so much as it is the object of our faith that saves us. Imagine two Israelite neighbors who have prepared themselves for this night and are awaiting the passing over of the angel. The first family is huddled around the Passover lamb, and all are frightened and trembling. The father and mother look at each other and then at their firstborn son with deep anxiety. They keep hugging their firstborn and urge the family members to pray for God's deliverance of him. For hours, they huddle in fear like this. The scene in the house of their neighbors is somewhat different. They too are huddled around the Passover lamb, but the atmosphere here is more like a joyful feast. They are looking forward to leaving Egypt, and they are filled with gratitude and a sense of security as they cast repeated glances to the blood on the doorposts and lintel. Which firstborn son was safer that night? The answer is that both were equally safe because they were both under the blood. The greater faith of the second family did not result in a greater safety. It is not the strength of our faith that saves us, but the object of our faith. We trust in the blood of the lamb of God and are safe, even if our trust wavers at times. But how do we know that we are under the blood? What will be the results of having escaped this judgment of God? That brings us to our final point.

III. The Results of Escape

I notice four results of having escaped this avenging angel. There is a new humility, a new identity, a new priority and a new joy. The first one is a new humility. We can see that in verse 22, where Moses warned them, “None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.” The humility comes in seeing that they are fundamentally no different than the Egyptians. They had no protection in their national or racial identity, but only in the blood. Therefore, they must stay covered. A sure indication that we have escaped the judgment of God is a new humility that recognizes that we are fundamentally no different from others.

There is also a new identity. Before the Israelites left Egypt, God told them to ask for the valuables owned by the Egyptians. God went before them and caused the Egyptians to be so generous to Israel that a large measure of the wealth of Egypt left with these formerly poor slaves. As they marched out of Egypt, they did so wearing the finest jewelry and clothing the world of their day offered. It's as if they could walk through Parisians and Saks Fifth Avenue and take whatever they wanted before setting out on their journey. That's a picture of what God does for us in saving us. He not only delivers us from the guilt of our sin, but he also gives us a new identity and a new status in him. We have been dressed in the righteousness of Christ, and when we believe that, we will stop wanting to go back to the clothing of our slave days. The righteousness of Jesus, which forms our new clothing, is the finest clothes available in all heaven and earth. As we believe that, we will stop longing for our old clothes consisting of things like looking good and being right before others.

There is also a new priority. God told them to eat the meal in haste, with a sense of urgency. They were to do so with their sandals on their feet and their robes tucked under their belts, ready for action. When God delivers his people, one of the results is that a new priority begins to dominate. There is a new urgency not unlike the call that went out over the Titanic after it struck the iceberg and it became clear that it would sink. The call was to man the lifeboats, and that call became of sufficient urgency to disrupt the other plans the passengers may have had for that night.

Finally, there is a new joy. The children of Israel went out singing, expressed a few chapters later in Miriam's song (ch. 15). Joy results not from focusing on joy, but as a byproduct of looking to the Lamb. If you have lost your joy, it won't return by thinking about joy. It comes by looking to the Lamb and seeing that you are covered under his blood.

CONCLUSION:

Fifteen hundred years after this first Passover, Jesus was gathered with the twelve disciples on the very night of the Passover celebration. Luke tells us that Jesus refused to eat of the lamb that night (22:16). Instead, he gave them the bread and said, "This is my body broken for you." He gave them the wine and said, "This is my blood poured out for you." On this Passover night, he invited them to feed on him for one simple reason. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the only means of escape, but he is a sufficient means. His blood averts the judgment.

I want to point out one final truth before closing. Did you notice that the preparations to apply the blood had to be made prior to the coming judgment? Applying the blood after the destroying angel left would do no good. In the same way, the application of Jesus' saving blood must be done prior to that great day of God's judgment. May God grant that each one of you is covered by that blood!