

First Presbyterian Church
Exodus 1:1-7; Luke 22:1-8, “The Exodus of Israel”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 9/10/2023

I’m so grateful for the annual cont. ed. time and resources this church provides.

You might remember that in June I took a week for a preaching conference at Mt. Angel Abbey which focused on the book of Exodus.

It was taught by Tim Mackie, who is a renowned biblical scholar who runs an excellent website for biblical exploration called, “The Bible Project.”

This is the first in a 12 part series which draws on Tim’s presentation in that conference and my prayer is that God will infuse you with the same enriching joy and wonder that I now have when I consider this amazing book about God’s miraculous deliverance.

This is a much more profound book than I had previously thought with tremendous implications for how we understand God, what God calls us to in our own journey of faith, and raises some difficult questions about free will and how God engages with world powers.

Today I want to emphasize *why* Exodus is an important book for us to study and how essential it is for us to understand what God has done in the world through the Messiah of Israel, Jesus Christ.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are, at their heart, accounts of how God came among us in Jesus Christ, who lived a life of love, was crucified and rose to new life as King of Kings.

But to phrase that even more pointedly, in concentrated form, and to connect with the language used by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the early church, the gospels are the story of salvation through Christ crucified. This is a shorthand way of describing the Gospels while implying everything else.

In much the same way, the book of Exodus is the story of how God,
who chose the Hebrew people as descendants of Abraham and Sarah,
saved them through the Passover and their escape from Egypt
and made a covenant with them.

To phrase that even more pointedly, in concentrated form,
the book of Exodus is the story of God's Passover salvation.
The reason we are going to take 12 weeks to look at the book of Exodus
is because according to the New Testament,
these stories are deeply and inextricably connected.
As my professor Gordon Fee used to say, "You can't understand
the New Testament *at all* if you don't understand the Old Testament."

This is literally true of what we find in Luke 22:1-8.

Jesus has just predicted that the massive temple in Jerusalem will
(which he was teaching in!) would be thrown down
and that the great powers of the earth will be shaken
but that his words will stand forever.
Each day people came to hear him teach like this in the temple.

Chapter 22:1 reads,
"Now .. the Festival of Unleavened Bread,
called the Passover was approaching."

We don't hear that it was the Festival of Unleavened Bread,
but rather that Festival of Unleavened Bread was approaching.
Why is this festival an important marker for Luke the gospel writer?
What significance does it have for the story of Jesus?
If we don't know the story of Exodus, we cannot answer those questions.

In verses 2-6 we read of the chief priests and teachers of the law
conspiring with one of Jesus' own disciples, Judas.
Judas agrees to betray Jesus into their hands when no crowds would
be there to interfere.

**V. 7: "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on
which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed."**

Why? Why does the Passover lamb have to be sacrificed?

As readers of Luke's gospel, we know that the chief priests
want custody of Jesus so that they can hand him over
to the Roman Empire for execution.

As readers of Luke's gospel, we can tell that there is an association happening here
between the Passover lamb and Jesus himself.

But why can't there be some other way?

Why is all of this happening during the Passover?

What is the meaning of this connection for the people of Israel?

What is the meaning of this connection for all who have faith in Jesus?

Jesus knows the answers to these questions because he knows the story of Exodus.
In fact his life and ministry demonstrates many echoes of what God
did to bring Israel out of bondage in Egypt and into the promised land.

Jesus cares deeply about this story and everything that happens to him
in the final days of his life on earth are predicated upon it.

With full knowledge of all this, he turns to Peter and John and says,
"Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

What is the importance of the Passover for the gospels?

What is the connection between Exodus and the people of Israel
and the life of Jesus?

Some of us might be able to give a one or two sentence answer to these questions
that point us in the right direction, but nothing can take the place
of immersing ourselves in the Exodus story itself
and learning to see utter strangeness of God
and the unending love of God
and the passionate commitment of God
to these people in their own words.

That is why we are taking the next three months to focus on this book
and I hope that you will make time in your week
to read Exodus along the way.

If you are meditating on this story in your own time,
a lot more will sink in on Sunday.

[PAUSE]

Last week we investigated the end of an era in Genesis 49 and 50.

We saw how the death of Jacob and Jacob's 12 sons
(who are the source of the 12 tribes of Israel) resulted in a situation
where the people of Yahweh's promise and blessing
faced a terrible curse living in Egypt far from
land of Canaan.

Last line of Genesis states bleakly: Joseph was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Exodus picks up at precisely this point in the narrative.

**"These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with
Jacob, each with his family."**

Genesis 50: ...a coffin in Egypt.

Exodus 1: ...who went to Egypt....

Jacob, who is also known as *Israel*, was buried in Canaan,
but his 12 sons who inherited Yahweh's promise ... they went to Egypt.

Not just these 12 but also their families ... 70 in all.

Then we get to v. 6:

"Now Joseph... and all his brothers... and all that generation... died."
They all died! This is bad.

Who is left? Who will carry on the promise of Yahweh?

Everybody else is what my kids call an "NPC" in video games,
a non-player character.

There is nobody left who has a name,
they are not plot relevant, they make no choices,
they are in Egypt and they don't matter.

If all you have are NPCs, there is no story to tell! This is life that is cursed –
life that is given over to the worst outcomes
of our sin and disconnection from God.

V. 7: *BUT!*

We saw last week that the curse of sin springs up everywhere
and spreads with abandon *but* our Creator God never tires of *blessing*.

We see that in a very surprising v. 7:

**“but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful;
they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers
and became so numerous
that the land was filled with them.”**

Did you hear that echo?

The stories of Exodus are replete with echoes and reworked imagery
from the book of Genesis.

In Genesis 1:27, after creating human beings in the Garden of Eden, God says,

“Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth.”

These are indicators of sharing in God’s *blessing*.

Here in Exodus 1 at a place of desperation

when nobody with a name worth knowing is even alive any more,
we discover the surprise blessing of God when we least expected it!

Israel was *fruitful*, increased in number, and the land was *filled with them*.

Tim Mackie’s personal translation of this verse keeps very close
to the word order of the Hebrew. He puts it this way:

“The sons of Yisra’el were fruitful and swarmed,
and they multiplied and became strong, very very much,
and the land was filled with them.”

The gift bestowed by God upon the original creation

has now been given to these descendants of Jacob who reside in Egypt.

Why? Why has God given this blessing?
It is what God loves to do.

And as we continue through this story we will see that God loves to bless
again and again – even when life seems full of oppression and darkness.

Does knowing that this story begins in Egypt
under such terrible circumstances
and yet with the enduring presence of God’s creative blessing
matter when we get to the story of Jesus
thousands of years later?

It absolutely does.

For Jesus also lived in a land full of people with no hope.
People who struggled under an oppressive empire.
People who longed to find a way back into the Garden of Eden.

This community of Hebrews in Egypt is like the seeds in the soil on Mt. St. Helens
that were activated due to the intense heat of the blast.

When the entire area had been destroyed it appeared
to be a wasteland that might never recover.

But soon – much sooner than anyone anticipated –
these seeds germinated and sprouted. They multiplied and became strong,
very very much, and the land was filled with them.

The power of God’s creative blessing is on display
all around us if we can see it with the eyes of faith.

Don’t hide from the dark places in your life or in the world.

God stands ready to love you in transformative ways
right where it seems the worst. It’s what Jesus loves to do!