

Title: *Why Is This Night Different?*

Text: Exodus 12:1-14

On November 26, 2008, a gang of terrorists stormed the Taj Mahal Palace in Mumbai, India. After the carnage had left 200 people dead, a reporter interviewed a guest who had been at the hotel for dinner that night. The guest described how he and his friends were eating dinner when they heard gunshots. Someone grabbed him and pulled him under the table. The assassins came striding through the restaurant, shooting at will, until everyone (or so they thought) had been killed. Miraculously, this man survived. When the interviewer asked the guest how he lived when everyone else at his table had been killed, he replied, "I suppose because I was covered in someone else's blood, and they took me for dead."

In his book *Has Christianity Failed You?*, author Ravi Zacharias uses this story to illustrate the sufficiency of Christ's death for our sin:

This is the perfect metaphor of God's gift through Jesus Christ to each one of us. Because he paid the penalty for our sin—because we are covered in the blood of his sacrifice—we may have eternal life.

We are in the season of lent. We're not like a lot of more liturgical traditions where we talk about giving something up for lent – that's not really a part of who we are or what we do. If such a practice helps you feel closer to God and helps you remember what Christ did for you, that's fine.

It is a season for remembering what Jesus Christ did for us as the lamb without spot or blemish who was slain from the foundation of the world.

I'm entitling this series *Jesus: Lamb of God*. Isn't it interesting that the animal that we would most usually associate with Jesus is a lamb?

Phillip Keller, a shepherd by trade writes in *A Layman Looks at the Lamb of God*:

During my own years as a sheep rancher, the so-called "killing season" was a time of personal anguish and remorse. Yet the slaughter of lambs was absolutely essential to the success of the ranch operation itself; some lambs simply had to be sacrificed every year in order for the rest of the flock to flourish and thrive. The flock had to be kept to a size that the ranch could support in terms of optimum nourishment, shelter, and disease control. My own survival as a shepherd depended directly upon the substitute death of my own lambs.

This was no easy thing for me – no light task; no careless, casual incident. The little creatures are so silent in the hands of their owner. They do not bleat or scream in protest. It is almost as if they quietly acquiesce to their own death. As the killing knife severs the jugular vein from which the warm lifeblood flows, there is not a sound. The little, innocent life, lived so briefly, so fleetingly, for a few months, is poured out in but a few brief moments.

They are born to die!
They came briefly but for this one purpose.
Out of their death springs life for others!

This Passover/lenten season, we celebrate that from the death of a lamb – The Lamb – comes life for others. The lamb shows up early in the pages of Scripture as a sacrificial animal. We're told in Genesis 4 that Abel brought to the Lord some of the fat portions of his flocks and presented an offering that pleased the Lord. When Cain saw that Abel's offering was pleasing and that his wasn't, he became so enraged that he murdered his brother.

When God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, as they were making their way up the mountain with that awful command ringing in Abraham's ears, Isaac asked the question, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

Now the scene fast forwards several centuries. Isaac's grandson, Joseph, had been sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. Through the providence of God, he is raised up to be Pharaoh's second in command and saves the world from famine.

In gratitude, Pharaoh allows Joseph's family to settle in the land of Goshen in the Nile Delta. God's blessing is upon his people and they thrive and prosper. The miracle baby Moses is rescued from the evil decree that all of the male babies be killed as they are born.

This Moses is raised in Pharaoh's household as a grandson of the Pharaoh and he is the one who is uniquely qualified to go before the king on the behalf of God's people and say, "Let my people go!"

After his burning bush experience, God calls him to go and stand before Pharaoh. This is all a part of a larger drama that God is playing out in delivering his people from their oppressors. We're familiar with all of the excuses that Moses came up with – Who am I? I've killed a man, I can't go back there! I've never been a good or a forceful speaker? Who should I say sent me? What is your name?

God says, "I am who I am. Just tell them I Am, the great I am has sent me to you.

In Exodus 3:16 and following (Isn't it interesting how many great Bible passages are found at 3:16), it says, "Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob--appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.'¹⁷ And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites--a land flowing with milk and honey.'

Then God reassures him,¹⁸ "The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.'¹⁹ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him.

²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

It's a wonderful promise, but what they didn't understand and could not appreciate were the difficulties that would come along the way as that was about to happen. One writer summarized all that the Israelites learned through their Exodus when he said, "What the Exodus ... taught: first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt. Second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land. And third, that "the way to the land is through the wilderness."

Moses was able to do some miraculous and incredible things. He threw down his staff on the ground and it became a snake. He put his hand inside his cloak and it became leprous – white as snow.

The Passover and the Exodus are events that have a hard edge to them. They're unpleasant to talk about and to think about in some ways. God is acting on behalf of His people but there are consequences for those who stiffen their necks and harden their hearts against what God wants for His people.

God tells Moses, "²¹ The LORD said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. ²² Then say to Pharaoh, "This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, ²³ 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.' "

There is ample warning early in the story of Moses and Pharaoh of what's going to happen and the question is will Pharaoh acknowledge God and believe? Would Moses and the Israelites acknowledge God and respond in faith and belief?

There would be a series of plagues that would show God's mighty power and his superiority to the gods of Egypt. There would be affliction and hard conditions, but there would also be the reassurances of God along the way. God says, "'Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country.'" ² God also said to Moses, "I am the LORD. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. ⁴ I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. ⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶ "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. ⁸ And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.'"

That deliverance involved a series of plagues upon the Egyptians. It was so that Pharaoh might soften his heart even though God had said that his heart would be hardened. First, the Nile River was turned to blood. Interesting thing though. Pharaoh's magicians were able to reproduce the same effect.

A week later, when Pharaoh refused to obey God, frogs came up out of the Nile and infested the entire land of Egypt. The magicians could do the same thing. Pharaoh had to ask Moses to pray for the frogs to leave, though.

Then there were gnats and there were flies and the magicians reported to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God. Then there was a plague on the Egyptians' livestock and there were boils and there was hail and there were locusts. And there was a plague on darkness.

All of these plagues were because the Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to obey God and to honor him.

In Exodus 11, we read, "Now the LORD had said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely. ² Tell the people that men and women alike are to ask their neighbors for articles of silver and gold." ³ (The LORD made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh's officials and by the people.) ⁴ So Moses said, "This is what the LORD says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. ⁵ Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. ⁶ There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt--worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. ⁷ But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal.' Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. ⁸ All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, 'Go, you and all the people who follow you!' After that I will leave." Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh. ⁹ The LORD had said to Moses, "Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you--so that my wonders may be multiplied in Egypt."

Maybe the wonder is that God made a way of deliverance for His people. Something they could look at and point to and test and strengthen their faith in God. God says, "I will strike all of the firstborn in Egypt, but this is what will have to happen.

This will be a deliverance. It will be symbolically at the beginning of a new year. This will be the first month of your year because this will be what signifies for you that this is your new beginning. 430 years as slaves, now you begin life as a free people.

On the 10th day of this month, take a lamb for your family, a lamb for your household, if your household is too small for a lamb, share one with your nearest neighbor. This isn't something that God does for us just in isolation. It happens for us in community.

There will be an awful price to pay. A lamb will be slaughtered for each family. A precious, vulnerable animal that has no way of knowing what's going on or why. And the lamb

should be a year-old male without any defect. It wouldn't make any difference in the taste of the meat, but it would signify that we were giving our very best – we were making a sacrifice for our deliverance.

Take care of these lambs. Contemplate their innocence. Contemplate what they will do for you, and then you are to slaughter these lambs at twilight. After you slaughter the lambs, you need to collect the blood and you need to put it on the doorposts of your homes.

That same night as you eat the meat, eat it in haste with your bags packed and ready, so-to-speak. Roast it because it's the quickest way to cook it. You need to be ready to go whenever the word comes. You won't normally wear your shoes and your cloak while you eat, but this time, you'll need to eat in haste.

Eat the meat. Eat the bread baked without leaven. Eat it in haste because your deliverance will come in haste.

Eat the whole animal roasted. Just gut it and remove the entrails then roast it.

When you've eaten this, at night, I am going to pass through and you will be reminded that I have not forgotten you. I will bring judgment on the gods of Egypt. I will show that I am stronger, mightier, superior to the gods of Egypt. And the blood on the doorpost will be the sign that you believe me enough to do what I tell you to do. You will be spared. No destructive plague will touch you.

I remember being at the temple mount in Jerusalem with Professor Wayne Ward, a very colorful character. He waxed eloquent about the rivers of blood that had been shed on this very spot in an effort to atone for sin. After saying that the Muslims who now control the temple mount would not appreciate prayers offered in the name of Jesus, he asked me to pray. We thanked God that all of the judgment that belonged on our disobedience was placed on Jesus Christ on Calvary's mountain.

Preached at Salem Avenue, March 13, 2011 a.m.