

Observe, Consecrate, and Remember
Exodus 12:14-20, 13:1-16
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Read Exodus 12:14-20, 13:1-16

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40:8)

Introduction:

Do any of you watch the TV show "This Is Us"? It's one of the few TV shows that my wife and I watch together other than Red Sox games or the occasional Steelers-Patriots game; it's not a perfect show, but we like it. The show is centered around three children of a couple, Jack and Rebecca, and it goes back and forth in time as you see their childhood experiences and how those affect their adulthoods. If you are hoping to watch it and you just haven't gotten around to it, you might want to plug your ears here. This is not a huge spoiler because it happens in the first season and there have already been 3 seasons, but a lot of the show centers around the death of the father, Jack, and how it reverberates through the three kids' lives in very powerful ways. Part of the reason that I like the show is that they present a wonderful, though flawed, dad who is so important to his kids and his wife that he profoundly affected their lives as they grew up and his influence lives on after he dies. It gives me a lot of hope as a dad and a husband, but it also greatly challenges me.

Anyways, there is a tradition that the family keeps every year on Thanksgiving day after Jack's death: they all go for a 3.4 mile hike, watch *Police Academy 3* on VHS, eat hot dogs, someone dresses up as Pilgrim Rick, and then they pass around yarn as they talk about what they're thankful for. Seems like a random, strange collection of events, especially since they have to introduce their spouses and kids, who have no connection to these events, to it. But those were the exact events that happened when they got stranded one Thanksgiving while Jack was still alive, and those were the things that Jack had them all do to salvage that Thanksgiving. So they repeat it every year, they remember how great their dad was, and they relive and reconnect with their memories of him.

In today's Exodus passages, God gives the Israelites a ritual that will last a whole week. Their God is still alive, but they are to repeat it every year to remember how great He is, and to relive and reconnect with their memories of Him. Remembering is an important part of faith, particularly as we look to pass our faith down to our children. Let's get to the text, starting with the seven verses that I skipped when I preach on Exodus 12:

I. A Feast Without Yeast (12:14-20)

14 *"This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance. 15 For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. 16 On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat; that is all you may do. 17 "Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. 18 In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. 19 For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And anyone, whether foreigner or native-born, who eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel. 20 Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread."*

This seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread was not going to be observed while Israel was still in Egypt. I was confused on that point originally because there doesn't seem enough time for them to celebrate this before they have to leave. And that's true – this is a feast that would be celebrated in the years to come. And it was attached to the Passover meal that we talked about in depth two weeks ago. Passover dinner kicked off a week's worth of eating, observing this feast of unleavened bread. It was more than just a feast, it was kind of like a revival week – according to verse 16 there was to be a worship service on each end of the week. And everyone got off work so that their attention would not be divided. Probably the closest we get is the Thanksgiving weekend – all Americans certainly have the feasting part down, hopefully Christian believers have the “remembering, honoring, and thanking the Lord” part down as well.

The most obvious, repeated thing in these instructions is that the Israelites were to avoid yeast; it says it five times. That seems weird – why yeast? Is this some kind of gluten-free forerunner? Was the yeast sacrificed to idols, some religious connotation for the Egyptian gods? No, it's neither of those things. First off, on that first Passover, Israel had to leave Egypt quickly and didn't have time for their bread to rise, so in years to come it was honoring and remembering that. But also, Scripture uses yeast or leaven as a symbol of a negative influence, usually sin, that spreads throughout a whole loaf. As Israel leaves Egypt, they are to rid themselves of the evil, idolatrous way of the Egyptians.

With the Passover there was a pretty dire consequence if you didn't put the Lamb's blood over your doorpost – your oldest son died. There a consequence here too: verse 15 says that “*whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel.*” It's repeated in verse 18 in case you missed it the first time: “*And anyone, whether foreigner or native-born, who eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel.*” Imagine having restrictions like that applied to our holiday festivities: if you eat steak on Thanksgiving instead of turkey, you'll be kicked out of your family. If you don't drink eggnog or exchange gifts on Christmas, you're shunned from your community. If you don't dye eggs at Easter time, we're disowning you. I'm not sure what the exact parallel would be; it all seems really harsh. But it's symbolic of embracing your old life of sin.

In 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Paul says, “*Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the **festival**, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*” The bread with yeast is our old nature, sinning away. Bread without yeast is our new nature, working to be holy led by the power of the Holy Spirit. So for Paul, “to keep the festival” is to replace sinful conduct (“malice and wickedness”) with godly behavior (“sincerity and truth”). In the context of 1 Corinthians 5, Paul is saying is that if you don't exhibit the righteous life of the Spirit, you are in danger of not truly being part of Christ's people, whether through church discipline, or just not realizing that you're an unbeliever and so never committing your life to Christ. Our new lives as believers in Jesus should be marked by striving for purity and godly action.

Philip Graham Ryken summarizes all this: “When we consider how the Feast of Unleavened Bread is connected to Passover, we discover a very important truth about salvation – namely, that we are saved in order to be sanctified. Passover is about getting saved. It reminds us that we have been delivered from death by a perfect substitute whose blood was shed as a sacrifice for our sins. The Feast of Unleavened Bread reminds us what God wants us to do once we've been saved, and that is to live a sanctified life, becoming more and more free from sin.”¹

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), p. 338.

Now we skip over to the first ten verses of chapter 13:

II. Remember This Day of Leaving Egypt (13:1-10)

¹ The Lord said to Moses, ² "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." ³ Then Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. ⁴ Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. ⁵ And when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. ⁶ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. ⁷ Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. ⁸ You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' ⁹ And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰ You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year.

Does anybody tie string around your finger to help you remember things? I remember hearing that worked so I tried it, but I would get so used to having the string on my finger that I would still forget whatever I was supposed to do. Then I started writing on my hand if I really needed to remember something, now I just put it in my iPhone calendar. Verse 9 ("*and it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes*"), the Jews eventually honored that verse in a very literal way by wearing what were called phylacteries, little pouches on their wrists and foreheads that contained Bible verses.² I'm not sure that verse was meant to be taken that literally, but if it works, great. I think it's intended to say, "You work with your hands and you see with your eyes, and both of them need to be guided by this understanding and memory of what God has done for you."

The Lord wants the Israelites, when they enter and settle the promised land, to keep in mind all that He has done for them so that they will keep their covenant with Him. The five tribes listed in verse 5 will have to be defeated and removed for the Israelites to gain the Promised Land. So there will be more victories from the Lord that they will celebrate, but leaving Egypt is the ultimate one because of the 430 years there and the freedom from slavery. Why is the Bible so big on calling God's people to remember? Shouldn't we always be pressing forward, forgetting what lies behind (as Philippians 3 encourages)? That phrase is out of context – we should lay aside our sins and press forward, and we look to what God will do. But it's just as important to be reminded of what God's already done. God knows that it's human nature that when we're in good times, when things are going fine, we forget what got us there. We forget how God helped us, we start thinking that it's all because of us. Here are Six Reasons To Remember:³

- 1) Remembering enables us to learn from history and avoid its mistakes. I'm sure you've heard the saying, "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it." We need to know spiritual history.
- 2) Remembering leads to wisdom – wisdom is learning from our lives and the lives of others, both mistakes and successes.
- 3) Remembering links us with those who came before us and reminds us we are part of an ongoing people. My dad has written down stories from his life and from our family so that his grandchildren know some of their history and heritage.
- 4) Remembering ensures that those who have suffered and perished are not forgotten – that's one of the mottos of 9/11 and why we celebrate Memorial Day: "never forget."

² Robert Rayburn's sermon "Studies in Exodus, No 14" from June 26 2005, found at faithtacoma.org.

³ Adapted from Dennis Prager, *Exodus: God, Slavery, and Freedom* (Washington DC: Regnery, 2018), pp. 137-138.

- 5) Remembering ensures that evil is not forgotten and allowed to disappear from history.
- 6) Remembering makes enduring gratitude possible.

Our last six verses see explicit instructions on how to

III. Redeem Your Firstborn (13:11-16)

11 "When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, 12 you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord's. 13 Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. 14 And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. 15 For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' 16 It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt."

The first born of every woman or animal that was part of the Israelite community was to be set apart to the Lord. God was not saying that every firstborn was to become a priest or something like that. Firstborn sons had the right of inheritance and were the future of the family in a manner of speaking. Consecrating the firstborn was to show that the whole family belonged to God. The firstborn was redeemed, verse 13 says, to be bought with a price. And God gives the answer for why they would do this in verses 14 and 15: when God struck down all of the firstborn in Egypt, He spared the Hebrews. So there is a connection where the Israelites owe an ongoing debt of gratitude to the Lord that the parents need to pay by redeeming their firstborn.

In Luke chapter 2, Joseph and Mary took their firstborn son, Jesus, to obey these verses. Verses 22-23 say that they "*brought him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.'*" Even in Jesus' day, well over a thousand years later, they were redeeming the firstborn. And the Firstborn of God who would become the ultimate Redeemer of God's people, the greater Moses, is first redeemed by a sacrifice. Douglas Stuart reminds us that, "the ultimate purpose of this instruction was to prepare the Israelites for the death of Christ on their behalf. Though most generations of Israelites could anticipate this all-important event only vaguely, they certainly could grasp the basic concepts involved: if a life is to be restored, it must be *bought back* (redeemed) by a payment; and that payment is often the substitutionary death of something for something else. Paul's assertion in 1 Cor 6:20 and 7:23, "*You were bought at a price,*" follows the logic of the Old Testament redemption system as it foreshadows the redemption price paid by Christ with his own blood."⁴ In order to redeem us, God offered up His firstborn Son – "*He... did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all*" - Romans 8:32. Colossians 1 says that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead, and Hebrews 12 describes God's people as the church of the firstborn. Each one of us has been redeemed by His sacrificial death.

Conclusion: Teach Your Children Well

The folk music legend, Pete Seeger, was once interviewed later in life. "Mr. Seeger," the journalist began, "you have been inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, you are the recipient of a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, a Kennedy Center Honor, and a National Medal of the Arts, your songs have become hits for artists like Peter, Paul, and Mary and the

⁴ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, Vol. 2, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), p. 317.

Byrds, and you have contributed to the civil rights, labor, and environmental movements... tell us, sir, what are you most proud of?" Pete paused in his way and smiled and said, "I stayed married to the best woman I ever met and we had three children and six grandchildren."⁵

When you look at your life, what do you consider your great achievements? I love Pete Seeger's perspective that pouring into the people in his life was more important than anything he did with work, art, or personal awards. Even if you're not married or don't have kids, you can appreciate that idea.

Who has God tasked with teaching our children the faith? We can get a lot of help from pastors, churches, teachers, but the ultimate source of teaching children the faith is their parents. Christianity is both caught and taught – it's both in what you say to your kids and in how you model it and live it out. Kids who have parents who teach them the faith but then hurt them or have clear hypocrisy in their lives are less likely to embrace the faith. We need parents who will commit that "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" and then do the hard work of both living it out and passing it on.

Verse 14 says, "*When your son asks, 'What does this mean?'*" and verse 8 says, "*You shall tell your son.*" We need to be ready to answer our children's questions as well as be proactive and bring things up, informing them as we go, as we live life. My parents did a great job of both scheduling times to read the Bible and pray together as a family (which is verse 8 – proactive teaching), as well as taking advantage of what they called "teachable moments" – times when I asked questions (like verse 14) or when they had a chance to shed spiritual/theological insight for life situations that came up. Sometimes it was addressing the moral and spiritual questions that were brought up by a movie or TV show we watched. Dads and Moms, if you've never done taken the lead in teaching your children Scriptural truths, if starting family devotions is intimidating to you, you could start just by following up on the sermon, ask your family what parts of the sermon resonated the most with them.

Proverbs 22:6 says, "*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*" This is a general proverb, not an ironclad guarantee that absolutely happens in every case. I say that because this has provoked a lot of angst in a lot of Christian parents through the years. They have a child who has strayed from, or rejected, the faith that they were taught. That's painful for parents, but it's a possibility. The Holy Spirit has to draw a person and give them a new heart. (And don't forget that a son or daughter's faith practices may look a lot different from Dad and Mom's; and also, that God is not done with your child when you don't see faith in their teens or 20s.) But if we are not intentionally guiding and teaching our children, they are less likely to embrace the faith.

Psalm 78:4, 6-7 – "*Tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and His might, and the wonders that He has done... that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, and keep His commandments.*" Let's commit to telling the glorious deeds of the Lord to the next generation, so that they remember His great works. May Jesus redeem our children and bring them into a fully-fledged, vibrant faith where they know and celebrate who He is and what He's done for them. Amen!

Benediction - 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it."

⁵ Ani DiFranco, *No Walls and the Recurring Dream* (New York: Viking, 2019), p. 113.