

Rediscovering the Cross - Part #1 “Slaughtered”

Text: Exodus 12:1-13, 28-30

- Delivered at Central Baptist Church on March 10, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Today we are beginning a new sermon series that is meant to lead us up to Good Friday and Easter Sunday. This series is framed around the question that Susan asked. She asked it toward the end of C.S. Lewis’ famous book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Lucy and Susan watched from a distance as Aslan, the lion and Creator of the world of Narnia, willingly submitted himself to a brutal death at the hands of the White Witch. Aslan was bound, his mane was cut off, he was muzzled, tied to a stone table and killed.
 - After the White Witch and her vile creatures had left, Lucy and Susan spend the night weeping over his body. At dawn they heard behind them **“a great cracking, deafening noise.”** They turned to see that **“The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan.”**
 - Suddenly, from behind them, they heard a great voice. **“They looked round. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before...stood Aslan himself.”** After both girls had **“flung themselves upon him and covered him with kisses”** Susan asks the big question, **“But what does it all mean?”**¹
- The cross of Jesus is everywhere. Crosses as necklaces, crosses on church steeples, crosses in the paintings of Rembrandt and the graffiti on the sides of buildings.
 - But what does it all mean? Tens of thousands of men were brutally crucified in those days. For instance, the Jewish historian Josephus describes how the Roman general Varus took two legions of soldiers to crush a revolt in Galilee. This took place right around the time of Jesus’ birth. Josephus writes,
 - **“Varus sent a part of his army into the country, to seek out those that had been the authors of the revolt; and when they were discovered, he punished some of them that were most guilty, and some he dismissed: now the number of those that were crucified on this account were two thousand.”**²
 - So if at least two thousand other Jewish men from Galilee were crucified in the same generation as Jesus then what makes his death so unique? What does it all mean?
- The cross can be understood from numerous angles. In December we spent four weeks looking at how Jesus’ death conquered the evil powers. In this series we are going to look at a different angle - what theologians call ‘penal substitution.’ The word ‘penal’ is a legal term that speaks of paying a penalty. It is a punishment. The word ‘substitute’ is something done on behalf of another.
 - So penal substitution means that when Jesus died at the cross He was standing in our place. As our substitute, Jesus bore the penalty of God’s wrath that we deserve.
 - Over these next few weeks we are going to draw out the key passages that teach this as we lead up to Good Friday and Easter.
- We begin by looking at the Passover Feast. Evangelist Rico Tice rightly points out that in giving these instructions God wants to burn two images into our minds.
 - First there is *the image of a devastated nation*. This image is God’s warning of judgment. Second, there is *the image of a bloodstained door*. This image is God’s provision of substitute.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Chapter XV, ‘Deeper Magic from *Before* the Dawn of Time.’

² Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 17, Chapter 10.10.

IMAGE #1 – A DEVASTATED NATION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First then let us look at **the image of a devastated nation, which reveals God’s warning of judgment.**
 - Over and over again God had called Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to release the Hebrew people from slavery. So far God has sent nine plagues on this tyrant and his people, but Pharaoh refuses to let the people go. This chapter describes the 10th and final plague. This is the final act of judgment and it is a bitter pill to swallow. **READ 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.**
 - This is a hard image to accept but we can understand why God would judge Egypt. Think of what the African American slaves went through. Israel is in slavery and is being treated that way and even worse for in chapter 1 Pharaoh orders that every Jewish boy under the age of two be drowned in the Nile River. God has come to judge this nation.
- But it is not just the Egyptians that God is coming to judge. It is also the Israelites for the destroyer is coming to their houses as well. If there is no blood on their doorframes they too will be destroyed.
 - In many ways Israel was just as rebellious toward God as the Egyptians. They rejected Moses when he spoke to Pharaoh on their behalf. The Israelites also grew to love the gods of Egyptian culture. A generation later Joshua still had to say to them **“throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped . . . in Egypt.”** Ezekiel 20:1-4 says the people participated in the idolatry of their Egyptian masters.
 - Alec Motyer writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 3) “When the wrath of God is applied in its essential reality, no one is safe. There were two nations in the land of Egypt, but they were both resistant to the word of God; and if God comes in judgment none will escape.”**³
 - This is a picture of all of humanity. The Bible declares that ‘all have sinned’ and therefore all stand under judgement of God.
- Now, there is perhaps nothing more offensive to Westcoast people than this image of a God who punishes. Even many Christians I meet do not believe that God punishes.
 - But we cannot escape what this passage says. Look at how many times the first personal singular is used in verses 12-13:
 - **“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD . . . no destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.”**
- Some people will say, **“Well I don’t believe God is like that. I believe in a God of love and tolerance, not a God of wrath and judgment.”** Do you really? Is God really loving if he does not judge? Listen to Miroslav Volf, the Yale theologian who lived through the nightmare of ethnic strife in Yugoslavia.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 4) “I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn’t God love? Shouldn’t divine love be beyond wrath? God is love, and God loves every person and every creature. That’s exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God’s wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia...According to some estimate, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry...How did God react to the carnage? (SHOW SLIDE 5) By dotting on the perpetrators in a grandfatherly fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators basic goodness? Wasn’t God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the**

³ Cited in Philip Ryken, *Exodus*, 326.

idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love."⁴

- So you see, it is precisely because God is good and loving that he will punish evil. So, if you want to believe in an all-tolerant God who sits back in his rocking chair as Toronto serial killer Bruce MacArthur murders at least eight men then you are entitled to your opinion. But I would suggest to you that such a God is not good or loving at all.
- Most people will then say, ***“Well of course God will judge people like Hitler and Bruce MacArthur but I am a good person.”***
 - Just for the sake of argument let's set aside all of God's laws for the moment. Imagine you have an app on your phone that starts recording every time you declare something about the way people should live and not live. Tell kids not to swear. Tell someone else they need to forgive. Say people shouldn't gossip. At the end of your life God takes it off, replays it, and judges you only according to your own standards. Could any of us pass that test? No. We have not even lived up to our own standards let alone God's standard of perfect love. We may not be tyrants like Pharaoh or Hitler but, like Israel, we all stand under a mountain of guilt.
 - There is a famous theologian from the 12th century named Anselm. A friend of his named Boso was accusing God of being unfair in judging people and asked Anselm what he thought. Anselm replied, ***“You have not yet considered the greatness of your sin.”***⁵
- Hear me now: if you want to know God you must first have this image in your mind – this image of a civilized and developed society devastated by the judgment of God. You must understand that 4000 years later our society has not changed. We still reject our Creator and so we stand under judgment.
 - I have spent so much time on this uncomfortable subject because the only way you will ever understand the cross is to first the terrible condition we are in. As John Stott writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 6) “We can cry ‘hallelujah’ with authenticity only after we have first cried, ‘woe is me, for I am lost.’**⁶
 - Let's not repeat the folly of Pharaoh. Let us heed the warning.

IMAGE #2 – A BLOODSTAINED DOOR

- We have seen the image of a nation devastated by judgment. We are now ready for the second image, which is **(SHOW SLIDE 7) the image of a bloodstained door, which reveals God's provision of substitute.**
 - What we see clearly in Exodus 12 is that the same God who comes in judgment is the same God who provides a way to be delivered from his own judgment.
 - What we see here is that God's way of salvation has everything to do with a lamb, and more specifically with the blood of a lamb. Let's look at the details of this Passover Feast. All of this is going to be important in a few minutes.
- First, each family was to select a lamb without defect. The lamb was to be one year old. It was in its prime because it was taking the place of firstborn sons who were young and full of life.
 - Imagine the power of this. The family raised the lamb. It was kept in or by the house for four days. The family would care for it, feed it, and play with it. They would identify with the lamb.
- Second, verse 6 tell us that on the fourth day they were to slaughter the lamb at twilight. This word 'kill' means “to slaughter.” It is not a pretty word. It is a graphic and explicit word. It means to kill by

⁴ Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, 138-139.

⁵ Modern Reformation Magazine, “Hell: Putting the Fire Out?”, 19.

⁶ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 109.

means of violence. It means to pull back the lamb's head and slit its throat – a violent death. The blood was then caught in a basin. Verse 46 also says, **“Do not break any of its bones.”**

- Twilight is the time ‘between the two evenings’ which the Rabbis took to mean ‘between 3 o’clock in the afternoon and when the sun set.’
- The third instruction is the most important of all. It was not enough to just slaughter the lamb. In the third place, verse 7 says they were to use a hyssop plant as a type of paintbrush and spread the blood over the entire doorframe.
 - Finally, in verses 8-11 we read that they were to eat the lamb with unleavened bread. They were to do this in a state of readiness—ready to leave Egypt when God delivered them.
- Now let's ask Susan's question. What does this all mean? The answer should be obvious. The lamb has acted as a substitute to pay the penalty that was demanded of the firstborn and his family. It is what theologians call ‘penal substitution.’
 - The fact that this is a penalty is clear. God is coming to punish. Since Genesis 2, death is held up as the ultimate judgment for sin.
 - And so this lamb is to have its blood spilled. Blood is the symbol of life. This lamb was to have its life violently taken away as it suffered the punishment of death.
- The substitutionary aspect is also crystal clear. Remember that the destroyer went to every house in the land – Israelite and Egyptian. Now if you could have entered each house in the land after that night what would you have found? In every Egyptian household you would have found a dead son. Inside every Israelite home you would have found a living son and a dead lamb. What is the obvious conclusion? The lamb has died in place of the son.
 - The only difference between the Israelite and the Egyptian house was the blood-stained door.
- Now let's see how closely you paid attention. Who was supposed to see the blood -stained door? The blood was there for God to see. **READ 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.**
 - When the destroyer came in judgment to an Israelite door he would see the blood and say in effect, **“A life has already been taken in this house. Justice has already been served.”** It would be unjust to demand punishment twice. And so the destroyer would pass over that house.
- Some people say, **“I don't like all this talk about blood.”** Well, you shouldn't like it. It is gory and disturbing. It should be. It is punishment. It is the taking of life. There is nothing pretty about it. But here is the point: it is either the life of the animal or the life of the son. Which would you rather have? The sword of justice must fall on somewhere. How gracious of God to provide a way of escape.
 - In verse 14 we learn that they were to remember this day and to celebrate it every year through a Passover meal. Over the centuries this sacrifice was repeated millions of times. In II Chronicles 35 we read that King Josiah celebrated the Passover by slaughtering 37,000 sheep. Imagine all that blood. Priests were basically professional butchers.
 - Yet not even these rivers of blood could take away the sin for as Hebrews 10:4 says, **“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.”** More and more animals had to be sacrificed. The blood of the animals was not precious enough. It had to be offered again and again.

JESUS THE PASSOVER LAMB

- Do you know where all this is going? Have you anticipated it? Let's not hold back any longer. Fast-forward 2000 years. John is baptizing in the river. He looks up and sees Jesus coming and calls out, **“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”**
 - One lamb. One sacrifice. Are we saying one single sacrifice can take away the sins of billions? Yes.

- One single sacrifice can satisfy God’s justice for all our sins? Yes.
- The blood of this one Lamb is so precious that it can completely turn aside God’s wrath from us? Yes.
 - The New Testament writers take great pains to tell us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover Lamb.
- Think of John’s gospel. John’s gospel basically reads like a countdown to the Passover Feast. In John 12 we read that it was **“six days before the Passover.”** In John 13:1 we read, **“It was just before the Passover Feast.”** And then we find Jesus sharing the Passover meal with his disciples. But this meal is different. Two things happen that are completely shocking:
 - First, whoever presided over the meal was expected to follow an established order that explained each part. Jesus acts in this presiding role. With the bread he was to say, **“This is the bread of affliction which our fathers had to eat as they were freed from Egypt.”** But Jesus does not say this. No. He stands up, takes the bread, and says, **“This is my body.”** Jesus is saying that his body will be afflicted so they can go free.
 - Jesus is saying that this old meal that has been celebrated for 2000 years is being superseded with a new meal. The old meal focused on the body and blood of the lamb slaughtered for Israel but Jesus says that this new meal will focus on his flesh being torn and his blood being spilled for Jew and Gentile. Shocking!
 - Secondly, there is something missing from this Passover Feast. Do you know what it is? It is the most obvious thing. The lamb. There is bread and there is wine but there is no lamb. Why not? Because the lamb is sitting at the table.
- That next day, between 3 o’clock in the afternoon and sunset, families were gathering all over the city saying, **“Thank you God for providing us with a lamb.”** At the temple the high priest was slaughtering the lamb for the sins of the people. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus tells us that this sacrifice took place at 3:00pm.⁷ Now are you ready for it?
 - Luke 23:43: **“It was now about the sixth hour (noon), and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour (3pm), for the sun stopped shining.”** Around 3:00pm we read that **“Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.”**
 - Do you see it? None of this is coincidence. Exodus 12 was given by God so that when Jesus came to Calvary all those years later we would know what it all means. At the same time the high priest violently spilled the blood of the Passover Lamb at the temple, Jesus the Lamb of God had his life violently taken from him.
 - Jesus was a lamb without defect for he had no sin. Jesus was around 33 years old and was in the prime of his life. Jesus had his blood spilled. That is why Paul says in I Corinthians 5: **“Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed.”** John is also careful to tell us **“that when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.”**
- Do you see the meaning of Jesus death then? Let me summarize everything so far. You and I stand under judgment. In order for God to be a good and just God he will and must punish. But the Judge is also the Saviour. Out of love for us God sent his most precious Son into this world and Jesus voluntarily went.
 - On the cross Jesus took the punishment we deserve for our sins upon himself. Jesus was the true and better Passover Lamb who died as our substitute, paying the penalty that we deserve. Jesus therefore is the means that God has given to escape the judgement that will one day come upon the whole world.

⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14.65.

CONCLUSION

- So all of this leaves each of us in one of two places. We are either in the Egyptian home or the Israelite home. We either have the blood of a substitute over us or we do not. A day is coming when God will come to judge the world. Do you have a substitute who has taken your judgement or not? Let's consider what is not like to have a substitute and what it is like.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 8) What is it like to not have a substitute?** To state it as plainly as possible: **(SHOW SLIDE 9) God is your Judge. Therefore, you are not passed over but are judged.**
 - We are all so much like Pharaoh. We do not believe God will judge us. We think we are indestructible. We say with Pharaoh? ***“Who is the LORD that I should obey him?”*** Friends let us heed the warning of judgement. God is good. God is just. He will punish wrongdoers. The only way to escape the inevitable judgment that is due to you is through the blood of the lamb.
 - The good news of Christianity is that God, out of love for you, sent Jesus to be punished in your place. But salvation is conditional. Just as the Israelites had to trust in God by putting the blood on their doors, so you have to call on Jesus to save you. To refuse to do so is to be like the Egyptians who were judged. Don't put yourself in that spot: come to Jesus and say, “Please forgive me of my sins through your blood”
- **(SHOW SLIDE 10) What is it like to have a substitute?** To state it as plainly as possible: **(SHOW SLIDE 11) God is your Saviour. Therefore, you are not judged but are passed over.**
 - Can you imagine that moment in the Jewish home? The father takes the lamb and says, ***“Son, you need to come and watch this.”*** He takes lamb's head pulls it back and slits its throat. As this violent scene takes place the firstborn son must have said to his dad, ***“Dad, why are you killing our precious lamb?” “Son, this lamb, this precious lamb without defect, our best lamb, he is dying so that you don't have to.”***
 - And imagine the next morning when the firstborn son got up. Over breakfast he would look down at the ashes of the lamb. In that moment he must have said to himself, ***“this lamb died for me.”***
- Oh you who know Christ, glory in the cross. Shout with Paul in Gal 2:20, ***“The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.”*** Can you say that personally? Remember with Peter that ***“you were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”***
 - And then let your heart rise with the worship of heaven and sing, ***“You are worthy . . . because you were slaughtered, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”***
 - Let this so fill you that you join with ***“every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea”*** and sing, ***“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”***
 - Will you meet God as Judge or as Saviour?