

Sermon File # 650

Scripture Text: Exodus 11:1-12:13

Sermon Title: *The High Cost of Deliverance*

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The High Cost of Deliverance

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me as we resume our sermon series from Exodus, the Old Testament Book of Deliverance. Today, in chapters 11 and 12 we come to the very heart of God's work of delivering his people, the Israelites, from their bondage in Egypt.

After Moses' dramatic call experience on Mt Horeb (Chapter 4) he surrenders to God's purpose for him by returning to Egypt with his brother Aaron. There he confronts Egypt's Pharaoh with the request that he release the Israelites from their bondage. The cruel dictator Pharaoh responded to the request by increasing the oppression and suffering of the enslaved Israelites, forcing them to produce the same amount of brick and having to produce also the straw, which made their labor almost impossible. Instead of rejoicing that God was going to deliver them, the Israelites complained that their suffering had only increased. Moses also complained to the Lord (5:22f), but then with Aaron was sent before Pharaoh to request the release of his people. This time his requests were accompanied by miraculous signs and plagues, showing God's power and authority (the plagues of blood, frogs, gnats, flies, death of livestock, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness). With each plague Pharaoh was given the opportunity to repent of his stubbornness and release the Israelites, but each time he refused, becoming only more obdurate in his refusal.

In today's text we come to the tenth and final plague, the one that finally broke, at least momentarily, the stubborn will of Pharaoh, forcing him to release the Israelites. Follow as I read our text, as we consider the plague of the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians and also the institution of the Passover, which was to become the annual and most important observance of the Jews.

Read **Exodus 11:1-12:13**.

Deliverance often comes at a great price. Here in Europe, deliverance from Napoleon's encroachment took place south of here at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. This deliverance came at the price of some 47,000 casualties. History books and Web sites give statistics that show the high cost of deliverance from American slavery during the War Between the States, and the cost in Europe, North America and Japan of deliverance from evil dictatorships during the First and Second World Wars. A heavy toll has been and is being paid right now by opposition troops for deliverance from the dictatorship of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

The deliverance of God's people from bondage in Egypt came at a great price, the death of the firstborn in every Egyptian household. This deliverance of God's people was a great event, and was celebrated by the Israelites with a meal called the Passover, which continues to be a celebration crucial to the identity and life of the Jewish people, a "defining ritual in Jewish self-identity" (Enns, 248). But the tenth plague and the Passover serve to prefigure an even greater deliverance that we have received as the people of God's New Covenant in Christ Jesus. Later in this service of worship we will celebrate our much greater deliverance, which came at a much greater cost than that which was paid in Egypt.

Let's note that the first cost involved in our deliverance is...

The cost to God

First of all we need to consider that our deliverance cost God...

His judgment of sin

For God to deliver his people from bondage to Pharaoh and his nation there had to be the exercise of God's judgment against all people, beginning with the Egyptians. The plagues are a graphic picture of God's judgment against sin as embodied in the idolatry of Pharaoh and the people of Egypt (Oswalt, NLTSB, 144). God's purpose is to make himself known and to be honored and worshiped as God, and when his revelation and offer of reconciliation are rejected, his only recourse is his judgment. The plagues upon Egypt were acts of God that showed his power over his creation. Pharaoh and the Egyptian people had become worshipers of the creation rather than of the Creator, and thereby exchanged and corrupted the glorious revelation of God, blinding themselves to the truth of God, becoming immoral objects of God's judgment (a sequence Paul describes in Romans 1:18-32).

The Egyptian culture was a death-denying one, which was dramatically confronted by this 10th plague, when the Lord's death angel struck down the first born member of every household, even the firstborn of the livestock. Even today you can visit the Great Pyramids, the Valley of Kings and mummies in museums around the world and marvel at the efforts of this culture to defy the inevitable reality of death. Pharaoh's firstborn son, who was stricken by the death angel, was the prince whose life also was to inherit the immortality of the Pharaohs (Ryken, 318).

Our Western culture is another death-denying one, in our glorification of youth and youthfulness, attempts to prolong life expectancy and our denial of the natural process and even the dignity of aging and dying. Not long ago I heard an well-known and now retired American television

interviewer, Larry King, express his unbelief regarding biblical faith in the resurrection and his decision to have himself, sometime before his death, frozen and kept in storage, to be thawed and restored at a later time when science will have discovered the cure for aging and provision of biological immortality.

However gallant the efforts of any civilization, the wages of sin will always and inevitably be death (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27). God created mankind to know and to glorify him, but sin brought physical and spiritual death and expulsion from the garden and the tree of life. God is perfectly holy but also is perfect love, and even in the garden he provided a covering and promised redemption and deliverance (Genesis 3:21). But even in providing the garment of a skin covering for Adam and Eve, another life had to be taken, blood was shed. The meta-narrative of the Bible is a story of God's persistent love and desire to bring lost and alienated mankind back into a love relationship with himself. And because God is a moral God, deliverance and redemption must include a cost, the cost of his judgment against sin.

We cannot think of God's judgment as an easy thing for him but rather as essential to his holiness in judging sin. The Prophet Isaiah said that his judgment is God's "strange work," his "alien task" (28:21). More "natural" to his nature is to act in kindness and love because God is love (1 John 4:8), yet he must also act with judgment against sin, unbelief and unrepentant rebellion against his will. The Apostle Paul says that Pharaoh, in his resistance to God's will in defiance of the plagues, became a display of God's power of judgment. Instead of responding to God's judgment revealed increasingly with each plague, Pharaoh persisted in his unbelief with an impenitent heart (Romans 9:16-18). The result of rejecting God's revelation is hardness of heart and the eventual inability to receive God's mercy and grace. Continuous rejection of the work and wooing of God's Spirit produces unpardonable sinners (Matthew 12:31f).

The message of Paul and all of Scripture is that we all stand under God's judgment and all are in desperate need of his mercy and grace. And this brings us to the next cost, the greater cost of deliverance to God. Our redemption cost God...

His redemption through his Son

The tenth and final plague brought Pharaoh to his knees, but not in true brokenness and repentance. He knew he was beaten, and finally relented enough to allow Moses and the Israelites to leave. This was after the death angel brought God's judgment of death to all the firstborn of Egypt. The Israelites were all spared, but for one reason alone. They too would have lost all of their firstborn except for one reason—the sacrificing of a lamb and the spreading of blood across the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses (12:7). After the lambs were slain and the blood was painted on the doorframes, then every Israelite family was to eat a meal that was to be instituted for the Israelites in perpetuity—the Passover Feast. The name "Passover" meant that the judgment of death would be averted as the death angel would *pass over* the blood-marked Israelite homes (Durham, 155)

Paul emphasizes that all have sinned and are under God's decree of judgment. Yet God has through his undeserved mercy and grace chosen those who would respond to him in faith. We who have come to faith in Jesus Christ realize we didn't choose him but rather he chose us, and he alone initiated our faith and brought about our deliverance (Romans 3:9-5:21; Ephesians 1:4; 2:8-9). Had the Israelites not sacrificed the lamb and spread the blood on their doorframes, the death angel would have stricken their firstborn. All the Israelites as well as the Egyptians stood

under the judgment of God. The only difference was the mercy and grace of God toward the Israelites who sought refuge in the Passover sacrifice (Ramm, 68f). Apart from God's mercy and grace through the gift of his Son, who shed his blood for us on the cross, we would be hopelessly lost in our sin and under the condemnation of holy God. Hebrews is a book that was written to converts to Christ from Judaism and is to remind them that the basis of their salvation and deliverance from the penalty of sin is not in their Jewishness and traditions but rather is in the sacrifice of God's Son upon the cross. It wasn't the shedding of the blood of their animal sacrifices that would make them right with God, but rather it was the shedding of the blood of Christ, the perfect Lamb of God (Hebrews 9:11-22), whom John said would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is the perfect sacrifice acceptable to holy God. The Israelites had to sacrifice a lamb without any blemish or defect (12:5), prophetic of the sacrifice of the perfectly sinless Son of God.

We can only marvel and praise God for the cost he paid for our deliverance from sin, death and hell. It's a gift we could never deserve and a price we could never repay (1 Peter 1:18-19). God simply chose the undeserving Israelites to be the people of his First Covenant and he has chosen those of us who stand protected under the blood of Christ, our Passover Lamb of Sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7), to be in his New Covenant. "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). In the same way, God provided for the "soon-to-be-delivered" Israelites by causing the Egyptians to be favorably disposed toward them, giving them valuables that would sponsor them on their pilgrimage toward the Promised Land (11:2-3). God's love and care are always with us, and the cost he paid for our deliverance is a guarantee of all we need and of much more to come in eternity.

There is an inestimable cost to God for our deliverance, but there is also...

The cost to his people

One of the most influential books in recent decades has been Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*. Those who know anything about this theologian, writer and pastor know that indeed he paid the cost of discipleship with his life. In this book, which is an exposition of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Bonhoeffer notes that there is no such thing as cheap grace. Although we cannot earn or deserve God's gracious forgiveness, we nevertheless must give our lives to Christ in a life of following Jesus, even unto death, as was the case with this young martyr.

And even with these Israelites, under the leadership of Moses, their deliverance cost them...

The humility of faith

For the children of Israel, there was nothing they could do to bring about their deliverance. They were helpless in the face of Pharaoh's army and as slaves in Egypt. They had been in exile in Egypt for 400 years, since the day that Jacob and his sons followed Joseph, who was their deliverer from famine in the land of Canaan. As long as the memory of national and international hero Joseph lingered in the national consciousness, the Israelites were treated with grateful respect. But the day came when there came to power a Pharaoh who didn't know or care to know about Joseph. Then the oppression began and the need for a deliverer became a desperate one.

God chose and called Moses to be the human instrument of his deliverance of his people, who could only trust themselves to God's work through Moses. There was nothing they could do to "help God out."

And the same thing is true for us. We are lost and helpless in our sinful condition and all we can do is exercise the humility of faith, believing in God's provision of a Savior, turning to him in faith and repentance, and following him as Lord and Master of our lives (Ephesians 2:1-9). All we can do is simply give him our lives. Grace is free but isn't cheap. It wasn't cheap for God and isn't for us. It costs us our lives, and our entire lives, without reservation.

Just as the Lord commanded the sacrifice of Passover lambs without blemish, so he requires the best that we can give him—our whole life and heart. God will not accept a partial sacrifice of a halfhearted commitment or the blemish of a heart that we keep partly in the world while we try to live a religious life on Sundays. Malachi's denouncement of Israel's blemished sacrifices is contrasted with God's provision of the sacrifice of the sinless Lamb of God and his demand that the Israelites offer a perfect lamb and that we offer ourselves as acceptable sacrifices (Malachi 1:6-14; Exodus 12:5; Romans 12:1; Motyer, 135).

Some refuse the offer of God's free gift of salvation through Christ, stumbling over the offensiveness of being classified as helpless sinners in need of what God alone can do and give. Pride was the stumbling block of the 1st Century religious leaders and is the stumbling block today, not just of religious legalists but also of secular humanists who see no need to rely on a Savior who finds them in desperate need of his mercy and grace through a cross. Deliverance comes only to those, who along with the Apostle Paul, realize all human self-help and attainment is nothing but rubbish and is worse than useless in attaining deliverance from life's emptiness and death's hopelessness (Philippians 3:8).

Deliverance costs us also...

A relationship of loving obedience

At the heart of God's choice of the Israelites and his call to them to be his people is his desire to bring them *and now us* into a personal love relationship with him. God provided the means, through the spreading of the blood of their sacrifices on the doorframes, for his chosen people to be delivered from the death angel and to liberty through pilgrimage to the Promised Land. God's purpose was not primarily to deliver them from one place or situation to another, but was rather to bring this people into a relationship of faith, trust and loving fellowship with him and with one another.

First, every Israelite household had to decide to leave Egypt. There were times, even after Moses announced God's plans to deliver them from their bondage, when the children of Israel complained that life was better when they were in bondage than after Pharaoh and his army began to heighten their oppression in slavery (5:20f). Again, when they stood on the edge of the sea and it appeared they would be slain by Pharaoh's advancing troops, they cried that it would have been better to serve the tyrannical Egyptians than to die in the desert (14:12).

Following Jesus as deliverer means we must accept our deliverance on his terms, which begins with a departure, a severance from our former way of life, including our sense of belonging to the world, and our old friends and our comfort zone. C S Lewis describes the powerful and

destructive force of “the inner ring,” that desire we have to be included in a group (55ff). Once we find acceptance in this inner ring, it’s almost impossible to not accept their standards; and then, when God calls us to a new life and allegiance to him, the process of pulling away can happen only by his grace and life in the Spirit. But when Jesus calls us to follow him in the way of deliverance he calls us to pay the price of the sword, when often old friends and family ties are broken because of our higher commitment to a deeper friendship with Jesus (Matthew 10:34).

That first Passover Meal was the first “fast food” meal on record. The bread was to be unleavened, since they didn’t have the luxury to let yeast do its work (12:8). And once the meal was prepared, they were to eat in their “traveling attire” and walking shoes, ready to follow Moses in their escape to freedom (Durham, 154).

Once we have counted the cost and have decided to follow Jesus in a life and destiny-changing relationship, we must be ready to obey and follow him at a moment’s notice, with no time to delay. To delay is to disobey when it comes to the life of a disciple (Luke 9:61f).

The Passover meal included “bitter herbs” (“bitter salad greens,” *NLT*), which was a reminder of their bitter service in Egypt, but also could have portended that life in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land would not be all sweetness and light. A life of following Jesus is to be a cruciform life, one of continual death to self and also persevering with Christ in spiritual discipline and formation, including sharing in his sufferings. But when we follow Jesus, we have the promise of his grace and the blessing of his joy and peace as we live in the power and victory of his resurrection. We have the assurance that God’s sovereign and loving will is being worked out in our lives and that all of our circumstances, good and bad, serve to form Christ in us and make us more useful and fruitful in Kingdom living and serving (Romans 8:28f).

We’ve all been praying for our fellow believers in lands of severe religious restrictions and even persecution, and at the top of the list of countries with the severest persecution of Christians is North Korea. Some years ago a North Korean follower of Jesus said, “We North Korean Christians are like nails. The harder they hit us, the deeper we go” (Harbour, 42). And we as followers of Jesus are to trust that with every trial his grace will make us stronger, driving us deeper into his love and grace, and that his joy and peace will fill us and assure us of our victory through the indwelling risen Christ.

The Passover meal was a celebration of the Israelites’ deliverance through the blood of the Passover lamb, whose blood had spared them from death and brought about a new beginning. As they ate the flesh of the lamb, they were to realize they were called to a personal relationship with Yahweh, their deliverer. It would be through a relationship of trusting obedience, of total dependence, that the Israelites would begin their long journey. If they would only trust and obey, the Lord, the great I AM, the Lamb of God, would see them through, all the way.

Conclusion:

Deliverance is free but not cheap. And now we will prepare to celebrate our new Passover meal, what Jesus instituted as his Last Supper, given to his disciples and commanded to us to observe in remembrance of him (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-13). As the great Scottish preacher Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910) said, when Jesus made the transition from the

Passover to his Supper, he exercised “an incomprehensible stretch of authority.” When he instituted a new observance in memory of his deliverance, “surely this was either audacity or approaching insanity, or divine consciousness that He Himself was the true Paschal Lamb.”

Now we know this side of the cross and the empty tomb that Jesus is our Deliverer. He paid the supreme price for us, to set us free from sin and death, and to call us to follow him.

As the Israelites ate the lamb and bread, so we eat the bread and drink the cup. This meal represents the body and blood of the Lamb of God, who has taken away our sins, and has delivered us to the gift of eternal life right now. Now we eat of his flesh and drink of his blood in a life-giving, life-changing and ever-satisfying relationship (John 6:25-59).

We eat this Last Supper as a celebration of our new life in Christ and as our communion he has made possible with himself and with one another. We are to examine, before partaking of this Supper, if we are maintaining loving, forgiving and reconciling fellowship with one another in his Body, the Church (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

Whereas the Passover is a backward-looking meal, as the Jews remember God’s deliverance in the past, the Lord’s Supper is forward looking as well as a meal of remembrance. We not only remember his past deliverance, but we also remember his promise that the next time he eats this Supper will be with us in glory at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Enns, 261; Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18; Revelation 19:6-9).

Outsiders and foreigners who saw God’s deliverance of the Israelites, who were willing to enter this covenant of blood and Passover, joined themselves with God’s people (12:38,48f). And today, you who are outside of Christ may join yourself with him and with us as you by faith accept the deliverance he offers you, and by faith turn to him begin now to follow him as your Deliverer.

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Think of some of the great acts of deliverance in history (such as wars against tyrants) or in current events (e.g. paying ransom to pirates). What is the relationship between the cost of the deliverance and the value placed on those needing rescue?
2. What was the price that Israelites had to pay for their deliverance from the death angel in the 10th plague? See 12:1ff
3. Read 1 Peter 1:18-19. Think about the price paid for your deliverance by Christ. How does that cost make you feel about your worth to God?
4. In light of what God has paid for our deliverance from spiritual death to eternal life, what assurance does Paul give us in Romans 8:32? How should this promise encourage you?

5. What the Israelites needed to do was simply trust, obey and follow the Lord through Moses' leadership. Why is it difficult for many to simply trust Christ for salvation? What makes it difficult for some to accept salvation by grace alone through faith alone? Do you tend to want or try to "earn" your deliverance/salvation?
6. What do you think might be signified by the elements of the Passover? The unleavened bread? The bitter herbs? The sacrificed Lamb? Eating while dressed to depart and move out quickly?
7. Discuss the significance of the Lord's Supper as Jesus' replacement of the Passover, looking in the Gospels (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-13) and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Share with the group or in prayer to the Lord what his Supper means to you.

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