

Title: The Firstborn are Mine
Text: Exodus 11; 12.29-32
Theme: The Firstborn
Series: Exodus #11
Prop Stmt. God demands our all because He is God and He gave us His all.

Read Text:

Actress Sharon Stone got herself into a little bit of trouble this week, as she suggested that perhaps the reason for the devastating earthquake in China was due to the Chinese treatment of Tibet. She later apologized. But the incident illustrates a reality for us. When something tragic happens, we want to know “why”. We assume there is a reason. But, why do we ask why? Why do we reason that there is a reason? The reason we are reasonable creatures who seek reason, and seek to reason is because we were pre-engineered by our Creator who does all things according to His reasons. God gave us the capacity and the desire to ask the question why because the true quest to answer that question will always lead us back to Him, because He alone has the answers to that question.

The ultimate answer to the question why, is God. Agnostic and or atheistic philosophy is hopelessly self-contradicting and unsatisfying. However, many will chose self-contradicting and unsatisfying theories so that they do not have to encounter the rational results of living under the authority of an all-wise, Sovereign, Holy Creator. Our text today is a difficult and weighty text for it deals with the 10th and final mighty act of judgment that God brought upon Egypt that was the occasion for the people of Israel to finally, be able to leave. When we think of God, it is comforting to a degree to see Him as the One who sees His people in their distress, who comes down to address their need and to ultimately free them from their bondage. In these chapters we ultimately see the movement of roughly 2 million people emptying out of Egypt, leaving behind their kilns, their shackles and their taskmasters. We hear their singing, we see their smiles, and we feel their excitement as impossible dreams come true. This scene makes us want to punch the air with our fists and say, “Way to go, God!” But there is more to the story than this. To only focus on this part, would not be a faithful reflection of the text. The same God who delivered Israel, brought death to Egypt. It is that part of the story that we are looking at this morning. The tragedy is enormous. The destruction brought about by the plagues is monumental. But, in this case, we are not left wondering why these events happened. God is very clear with the reason. The question that you must come to grips with is this, will you accept God’s revelation of Himself above your own?

We have now come to the very point of the story from which this book receives its name. This is the purpose for which Moses was saved from death at his birth, brought back from Midian in his old age, and the event that was consistently demanded from Pharaoh. “Let my people go so that they can go and worship me.” The leaving of the people of Israel from Egypt marked their beginning as a nation. Today, almost 3,500 years later, the Jewish people still commemorate this event. The Exodus from Egypt had several aspects to it. There was the judgment itself, which was the occasion for the Passover meal and

the sprinkling of the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their houses. There was also the plundering of the Egyptians, the leaving itself and the consecration of the firstborn. This morning, we are going to look at chapter 11, and a portion of chapter 12 which focuses on the announcement and execution of the 10th and final act of judgment of God upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. This is not just the 10th plague. It is the culmination of the judgments of God upon Pharaoh and Egypt of which the first nine were merely the prelude. When a mighty earthquake happens, like the recent one in China, it is common for there to be a series of aftershocks. The 10 plagues are a reversal of that. The first nine are a preview of what is to come. From irritating, to destructive and then to death, the first nine serve as warnings to what is to come.

I believe that some of what Moses writes here, he arranges topically. In other words, since Moses' purpose in recording this is to explain the significance of the Passover and other things, he presents the material in chapter 11 almost as a separate section, although the conversation between him and Pharaoh more than likely occurred at the end of the 9th plague. When Pharaoh was not willing (again) to let Israel leave (after the 9th plague) that Moses at that time announced what God had previously revealed to him. There was coming one final act of judgment that would be unlike all of the others. This time, instead of being granted permission to leave (as has been asked all along) Pharaoh would actually order the Israelites to leave. In addition to that, the Egyptians themselves would gladly give all of their valuables to the Israelites. The impact of this plague will be so strong and the change of heart will be so overwhelming that instead of Moses coming and requesting an audience with Pharaoh, this time Pharaoh's officials will bow down before Moses and will beg him to leave.

Like everything that God does, this act of judgment serves multiple purposes. Please keep in mind the 5 points from last week.

- 1. God will do everything that He has to do in order to keep His Word.**
- 2. Disobeying the Revealed Word of God brings (compounding) Disaster.**
- 3. Man's rejection of God brings the earth's rejection of man.**
- 4. There is no God like our God.**
- 5. God is preparing this world for His people.**

So, what is it that God is going to do that will be the crashing crescendo of this symphony of judgment? What is going to happen that the LORD will use to change the hearts of the Egyptians so much toward the Israelites that the Egyptians will invite them into their homes and give to Israel all of their valuables and allow themselves to be stripped bare of their money, jewels, treasures and fine clothes? The answer is found in verse 4. (read) Lest you are unclear as to what I am drawing your attention to, look at 12.29 (read). What do you not read? There is no such thing as the death angel in this text. Now, it is true that in 2 Samuel 24, God brings a plague against Israel that is administered by an angel. And that may be the reason why this story has often been told that at midnight God sent an angel of death to carry out the order. But the text is clear; the execution of the firstborn was an act of God, Himself. It is a fact repeated in Psalm 78.51; 105.36; 135.8; and 136.10. This is not an easy truth to grasp. How could God do such a thing?

Later on, God commands Israel to slay all of the inhabitants of Canaan (Deut. 7). God says, "...you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy." (Deut. 7.2b) Why? The answer is given in Deut. 7.10. It is because they hate God. **"But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him."**

God is serious about people loving Him because God is infinitely concerned about His glory. We were made to worship Him and follow Him. As the Creator, He made us with a call upon our lives. When that call is rejected by the creation, then God rejects that part of His creation. That is exactly what Egypt did. The rejected God, they replaced God with their own gods and goddesses, and now through these plagues, God systematically demonstrates that their gods are not gods at all. They have no power whatsoever. It was part of the religious ritual of some of the pagan deities to sacrifice the firstborn in order to appease the god. An illustration of this is seen in the end of 2 Kings 3. The god, by nature, was angry and demanded the ultimate sacrifice of that which was dearest to you, in order to be appeased. The appeasement may or may not work. It is interesting to note how many religious systems are built strictly on fear and the quest for power. What does God demand? What did God demand from Israel? **(Deut. 6.4-5) "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."** God demands your love, because God is worthy of your love. God demands your love because there are no other gods. God demands you to do what is right, because what is right is good. But, those who hate what is good, those who reject what is right, those who worship their own gods, are in reality setting themselves up against God. And God will not cooperate nor wink at that. God is God, He has the right to do whatever it is He wants (Ps. 135.6). What is it that He wants? He wants that which is consistent with what He is. He wants and demands what is right and true, good and holy. And when something or someone stands against Him, He will deal with them, decisively.

Now, in contrast to pagan gods, the true God is not fundamentally angry. God is and has always been holy, loving, righteous, and sovereign. He therefore commands us to be holy, loving and obedient. He does not demand us to kill our firstborn to appease Him, but He demands us to give to Him all that we are and all that we have, including our children. The firstborn son, represents your future. The firstborn son was to receive a double inheritance and carry on the name, provided he lived up to that task. The firstborn son was a position of honor for every family that carried with it extra responsibility. That is very important to keep in mind. God's desire was not for people to kill their firstborn for him, like the pagan gods, but to live for Him. He did want the firstborn to die for Him but He wanted the firstborn to live for him. The firstborn are mine, God said in Numbers 3.13. God's plan for Israel was for the firstborn to be consecrated to Him, that is set apart by the parents as ones who were dedicated to God. The firstborn in that sense represented the rest. The firstborn carried the honor, the name, and the future. Now, go back to Exodus 4.22. God told Moses to go before Pharaoh and tell him, **"This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, 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."**

God told Moses that, before the other plagues began. Now, it was time for this to happen.

1. **The Firstborn is Highly Valued by God.** (11.4)

In fact, God lays claim to the firstborn. Israel was his firstborn in the sense that Israel was the nation to whom God's name, honor and future was attached. When Pharaoh attacked Israel, he was attacking the name, honor and plan of God. You do not mess with that. What God was saying was, If you mess with my firstborn, I'll mess with yours.

Exodus 11.5 repeats the word 4 times. Ultimately, God was demonstrating how serious He is about protecting His own. He is so committed to protecting those whom He loves, that He will take out, He will judge, He will punish, He will kill those who attack them. God is serious about His love. God's love is an awesome and at times terrifying aspect to behold. God's love is not cheap and trivial.

So, that night, God killed the firstborn of Egypt; both human and animal, rich and poor, did not matter. There was no running and hiding from God. No god or goddess in Egypt's religious system had any power to protect them. All of the temples and statues that had been built, all of the prayers and sacrifices that had been offered (and they were impressive and abundant) were a complete and total waste of time, wealth and power. There is only one God and He demands and deserves love, worship and obedience. He demands your best and your all, because He is the best and He is all in all.

Immediately after Israel came out of Egypt, **“The LORD said to Moses, (Ex. 13.1-2) “Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal.”** The message is clear. I am the LORD, I own it all. Later on, God elaborated on this command, by having the entire tribe of Levi function in place of the firstborn. The tribe of priests represented the people before God. In that sense they were the tribe of the firstborn. In setting them apart, God said, “the firstborn are mine.” Egypt attacked Israel, the firstborn son of God. What would God do in response? This act of judgment is very clear. He acts in righteous anger toward those who attack His own.

Contemporary Christianity, I am ashamed to say, is often guilty of idolatry. The god that is often preached and described is not THE GOD of the Bible, but a god of our own desires. This often comes out in conversations when someone says, “Well, the god that I know and love would never kill anyone, or would never send someone to hell, or would never judge sin. The god that I know and love is loving, merciful, kind and good, as if we have to choose between a God who is loving and a God who is righteous. He is both. I not only believe that God is loving and merciful, kind and good, but I see from this text that God is serious about His own honor and those whom He loves. So, serious, that there is hell to pay, for those who ignore Him. But there is another reason why this 10th act of judgment focused on the firstborn.

2. **The Firstborn points to Christ and the Church.**

The reason that Israel was called God's firstborn, is because from Israel, God would bring forth His Son. And, out of Egypt, Christ would be called. The parallels between Herod and Pharaoh are remarkable. Both of them attempted to thwart God's plan in a way that actually carried out God's plan. God places a premium on the firstborn, because they point to Christ, who in Colossians 1.15 is described as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."

In Romans 8.17, the believers (the church) are described as co-heirs with Christ. We are positionally viewed as being firstborn. Like Israel of the OT, the church is here to carry on the name, to establish the reputation, to honor and esteem the Father. We are the firstborn of God in that sense. **Hebrews 12.23 says, "to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven."**

Next Sunday, we will look at the actual Passover event. The symbolism is so powerful. Every firstborn son, who was in a house where the blood of a lamb was applied to the doorposts and crossbar, was spared. God did not judge them, because a lamb was judged for them. God did not want to judge them. God wanted to spare them. God wanted to redeem them. God wanted to rescue them. God sent them information ahead of time so that they could know how to follow this awesome God. He told them to get a lamb. Kill the lamb, put the blood on your doorposts, and then on that night, I will pass over you. My judgment will not visit you, because I will accept the death of one in your place. 1400 years later, Jesus gathered with his disciples in the upper room on the night before his death to observe the Passover. The lambs killed that night in Egypt were all pointing to Him. He was the ultimate lamb whose life would be poured out through the shedding of his blood on the cross. When you believe that truth and trust in Christ alone as the Lamb of God who paid for your sin by taking your death, you become a child of God and part of the community of the redeemed. Communion is the ritual of the redeemed. Communion is the reminder for the firstborn. We are spared, we are forgiven, we are raised up, we are forgiven, we are declared righteous because God accepted the life and death of His firstborn, so that we could become sons of God.