

Shaping A Nation - The Road To Freedom

Exodus 12:29-51; 13:20-14:4

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It has become one of the most important days in the calendar of Jewish people - Passover. Celebrating the beginning of freedom and life for the Israelites. After telling Pharaoh of God's power, and demonstrating it again and again through the plagues, Moses is guided by the Lord in preparing His people for the last and most terrible event.

There are all sorts of meticulous regulations surrounding that time of Exodus. Regulation after regulation of how the first, and following Passover meals were to be observed. We read only a few of them. The preceding verses of chapter 12 describe more of the regulations.

A defect-free lamb to be slaughtered.

The sacrifice is to be done on a specific day.

Blood on the doorposts.

Roast the lamb and eat it in a specific way.

Dressed just so.

No yeast in the bread or in the house.

A sacred assembly to be held.

No work to be done.

Only those within the covenant community of faith may take part.

Eat only inside.

Meticulous law after law.

That's the first thing - their freedom came in the context of only one way, a narrow and very particular way. Any deviation meant death.

The second thing - perhaps you noticed. As the people are called into action, they are called to do so in faith. That is, they were called to get ready and begin to move without seeing everything of what and how God was going to work. They are called to prepare and sacrifice the lamb, to smear the blood on the door, and all the other elements of the Passover, without first experiencing freedom. They are still slaves when the first Passover begins.

Faith comes with reassuring promises of God. But sometimes that is **all** that believers have - the promises. Fulfilment remains in the future.

That's the second thing.

One more thing jumps out from this passage - when the Lord gives a direction to travel, the people are called to follow. For Israel the direction came through the words of the Prophet-Leader Moses. It was displayed through the visible presence of a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. That pillar would always in front of them. The people were called to keep themselves just as certainly behind it. When the cloud moved, they were to move with it. When the cloud stopped, they were not to go an inch further.

Freedom for the people of God:

- comes along a narrow, peculiar path
- comes in a setting of faith first, more than sight
- comes with a demand to follow God's step by step leading.

Those three truths are part of the road to freedom for Israel.

They also form pylons along the road to freedom for us in the New Testament Israel, the Church.

God's freedom comes along a narrow, peculiar path.

God's freedom comes through faith, more than sight.

God's freedom comes with the call to follow His step by step leading.

The narrow, peculiar path -

Israel found it through **a defect-free lamb to be slaughtered.**

Before this huge cross up front, Angie proclaimed faith in the defect free Son of God, the One whom the New Testament calls "Christ the Passover Lamb", (1 Cor 5:7) whose life was sacrificed for defect-filled people.

His sacrifice **in a very specific way** - hanging on a cross, cursed, between heaven and hell, rejected by both.

Blood on the doorposts. The only way that eternal death can be avoided is when at the door of our heart we paint the blood of Him who says "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone opens the door, I will come in...*" (Rev 3:20) Eternal Death cannot enter our lives when Jesus guards the entrance.

Dressed just so, Israel had to be - dressed in the clothes of marching and movement. Ah yes, faith in the Lord is never a static deal. It's never about hiding quietly in a corner. It's not about sitting on the

sidelines and watching. It is the faith of a pilgrim - of movement towards a new, better, promised reality. There is no standing still for believers. Rather, there is a call to be active in this world for the Lord.

No yeast in the bread or in the house. Yeast in the bible represents sin. A little that can infect a lot in a nasty, negative sort of way. Don't harbour sin. Anything that goes against the will and plan of God, don't tolerate its presence. Don't be ambivalent about it.

A sacred assembly to be held. You can't be ho-hum about the freedom that God gives. It demands observance. It must be recognized and honoured. Not just one by one, but by the community together.

No work to be done. Freedom doesn't come by our own efforts, by what we can bring to the table for God. Freedom comes entirely because of the powerful work of God, conquering sin and eternal death through Jesus Christ.

Only those within the covenant community of faith may take part. Does that sound awfully exclusive? Freedom isn't given in a context of whatever one believes is equally good. There **IS** a way to be INSIDE God's saving community. And, **yes**, you can be lost, outside, excluded.

Hence the last command - **Eat the Passover only inside.** It is a festival for the Congregation of believers. Like the Lord's supper that we will, Lord willing, celebrate together on November 6: a festival uniquely and exclusively for the congregation of believers.

The Road to Freedom is a narrow, peculiar road.
It is the road that Angie pledged to follow - and each of us with her.
It is the road that God calls us to travel.
It is narrow - but it has, at the end of it - **LIFE.**

Why narrow?

Because life can only come from the One who created Life.

Life can only come in His way.

Life can only come on His terms.

It was that way in the very beginning of time. Out of a shapeless, formless void the Creator fashioned an ordered, functioning life-filled Cosmos.

Life is His.

The very essence of sin is the stupid idea that life is best lived, or even **can be lived**, on our own terms. It can't.

And the specific regulations of Passover are a reminder of that.

It is **not** a matter of whatever we happen to believe is OK, as long as we are sincere about it.

It is **not** a matter of whatever way we happen to live is OK, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else.

There is right and there is wrong.

There is life and there is death.

There is in and there is out.

And while that may not be too terribly popular right now, not particularly in fashion at this moment, it is the timeless eternal truth of God.

The road to freedom for your soul and mine comes along the peculiar and singular road that God defines - the road defined in the New Testament as running right through an encounter with Jesus Christ.

That road is also one lived by faith, not first of all by sight.

Can you accept that?

How do you suppose those first Israelites felt when, surrounded by and still desperately feeling the effects of slavery, they had to take and slaughter a perfect goat? Not just slaughter it, but rub the blood on the doorposts. What do you think they said to the Egyptian who walked by and asked what they were doing?

What do you suppose they were thinking when they put on their travelling clothes before eating - wearing those clothes without any outer sign that very soon, in fact, they would be on the move?

What would go through the mind of the housewife preparing the bread dough, and then deliberately leaving out the yeast? Remember - they were terribly poor, and to even waste a wee bit of flour and oil would be an enormous sacrifice. Wouldn't that be the case by making unleavened bread?

All these things had to happen before freedom was tasted; before there was even so much as a hint that God was really there somewhere in the unseen dimension of reality - and not just there, but **active** in that dimension.

Nothing has changed there, either.

From time to time some of you wander in my office and comment on the number of books that line the wall. Fair enough - lots of them there. Covering a wide range of topics. But there is one topic **not** covered - absolutely, beyond the shadow of a doubt, with scientific methodological certainty, proving the existence of God in an empirical manner.

I can share with you my personal experiences and that of many other people.

I can give you a logically sound defence of the Christian faith.

I can relate all sorts of past historical details that fit with what Christianity teaches and preaches.

But I can't measure the presence of heaven on any meter.

I can't photograph God walking beside you as you get in your car while leaving here later this morning.

I can't provide you with any heaven-originated faxed certificates of salvation.

When Bill Vandevisch passed away earlier this week, there was no imprint of an angel on the bed beside him.

We are called to place faith in Jesus Christ, believing that such faith secures our eternal destiny, an inheritance and place in God's home.

We are encouraged to gather in groups and as individuals, stopping outer activity, and focussing in prayer to the Lord. Trusting, without seeing it, that He will hear those prayers and answer them.

We are sent out to work in Christian mercy and relief and service, believing **in faith**, that the work we do for the Lord is - as 1 Corinthians 15:58 says - NOT in vain.

We are called to witness to our neighbours, inviting them to faith in Jesus.

All these are actions of faith -

In faith to believe that membership in a local church is more than some mere social event, but a foretaste of the great community in Heaven.

In faith to believe that as we pour water on Noah and Conner God's claim and Spirit were resting on them.

In faith believing that angels applauded when Angie made her public profession of faith.

God calls us to exercise our faith with action - taking the first step, and then trusting that He will guide us towards the second step.

In fact - that is always how it works. Jesus called St.Peter out of the boat to walk towards him on the water. He didn't tell him what it would be like, or the physics behind the exercise. He simply said, "*Come to me.*"

He doesn't tell us the spiritual dynamics of unseen realms. He simply calls us to prayer.

He doesn't tell us how He can possibly manipulate the finances. He simply calls us to give.

He doesn't tell us the precise psychology of conversion. He simply tells us to witness.

Trust... and obey.

It was so for Israel.

It remains so for us on the Road to Freedom.

On the road to Eternal Life.

Yes...

...and **obey**.

That's the last - but not least element.

Faith in God is always visible.

It is active.

It is obedient.

It follows where He calls and directs.

Faith in God is not for couch potatoes.

It will not do to fill out a survey, discover what your spiritual gifts are, and do nothing about it.

It will not do if the Lord opens the congregational door and begins to introduce new people and groups into the community of faith, and yet have that community carry on as if the church is **our** church, for **us**.

It will not do if you know the Lord is leading you towards a particular career path, and you insist on heading in another direction.

It will not do for you to know that God demands fidelity towards your spouse, but allow you eyes and mind to wander.

It will not do for the Lord to call His people towards being an active voice for the poor and suffering, but have them claim busyness or small numbers as a reason for silence and inaction.

When God's direction is clear, His people **must** follow.

For Israel that came through a cloud and fire.

That same fire settled on the disciples of Jesus on the day of Pentecost.

It was the fire of the Holy Spirit.

That Spirit continues to direct the Church today.

Elders, deacons, pastors - leaders of the Church

Watch for where that fire is going.

And be sure to follow it.

Believers - don't get so caught up in the day to day hum drum of life that you forget to look up to see the fire of the Spirit.

Pray for that fire.

Watch for that fire.

Follow that fire.

For following God's leading is the road to freedom.

Today we celebrate that with Angie, as she publically confesses that she has chosen to follow that road. We pray that as her children grow, that they will make that same profession.

We celebrate with Sharon and Kevin and Sandy & Cheryl and Steven & Maria and John & Gerry that they have committed, openly and gladly and firmly, to follow that road together with us as members of this congregation.

And we pray for God's courage and conviction to stand firm in that commitment ourselves, too.

For it is life.

It is the only way to life.

It is the certain way to life.

Life... and freedom.

So it was for Israel.

So it is for us.