Following God into the Unknown – Part 5

# (Exodus 12:29-14:14)

Today as we continue our series, Following God into the Unknown, we find that Moses has gone beyond the point of no return. You could say, he’s all in, and he’s dealing with things that many of us are today, because there are battles that we all must fight, fears that we all must face, and things we all must go through. And so, we’re all in this together because we are the body of Christ and we’re following God into the unknown!

Last week we remembered the Passover, eating the Lord’s Supper together, and we saw how God instituted the Passover and the deliverance of his people with one last great plague that would come over the whole land. And this weekend as we celebrate Independence Day, we find ourselves in an incredibly divisive time both in the Church and in our Nation. Between the great injustice done to George Floyd and the devastating effects of COVID-19, it’s hard to keep up with all the new information, because today so much of it is merely opinion. News has become less about presenting the facts and more editorial or tabloid in function, with everyone using whatever platform they can to state their opinion regarding racial injustice, COVID-19, when to open or not to, to wear masks or not to wear masks. But what we must hear as followers of Jesus Christ, we must hear the Word of the Lord, that he is still

*“…sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left” (1 Kings 22:19).*

Today as we return to our study in the book of Exodus, we find God moving in a powerful way, delivering his people from bondage, setting them free from slavery, and it’s the dawn of a new independence, the beginning of a new nation. But it began with a sacrifice of great worth, because freedom is never free, and so it began with the shedding of blood, it began with the choosing of a precious lamb.

Interestingly, this isn’t the first time that we’ve seen this, in fact, this was Isaac’s question to his father as they prepared a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. In Genesis chapter 22, Isaac asked Abraham,

*“Where is the lamb?” (Genesis 22:7).*

And it’s a question that was ultimately answered many, many centuries later by John the Baptist when he pointed at Jesus and said,

*“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).*

And so, as we return to Exodus, it was on the 14th day of the month on that first Passover that a lamb was slain. Its blood was applied to the door frame of the house in which each believing Jewish family lived, but it wasn’t the life of the Lamb that saved the people from judgment, it was the blood. And so, it was the death of the Lamb, it was the shedding of its precious blood, as the Bible tells us in Leviticus chapter 17,

*“It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life” (Leviticus 17:11).*

And so, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was our substitute, dying in our place, and suffering the judgment of our sin; but to be effective, the blood has to be applied by faith, or you could say his sacrifice needs to be personally received by faith. That’s what the Bible says, the apostle Paul tells us in Romans that we’re made right with God when we believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood, because we’re justified by his blood.

The old hymn by Lewis Jones asked the question, “Would you be free from the burden of sin?” And the chorus answers the question saying, “There is power, power, wonderworking power in the precious blood of the lamb.” Because it’s through his blood shed on the cross that Jesus opened a new and living way, he restored our relationship with the Father that had been fractured by sin, giving us peace with God.

And so, backing up many centuries, rewinding to Exodus, going back to the people of God in Egypt on the 14th day of that month, the Bible says that each household was to take a branch of the hyssop plant and dip it into the basin of blood. They were instructed to take that blood from the lamb and using that flimsy branch apply the blood to the door posts of the house. I love the mental picture of that because it just seems so messy using the branch of the hyssop plant to paint with, but it’s really a good reminder that sin is so messy and our faith is as weak as the hyssop plant. In fact, Jesus said you just need a little bit, just a mustard seed of faith, because when we are weak, he is strong. And so, it’s not faith in our faith that saves us, it’s faith in the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

There is power in the blood and as we return to Exodus chapter 12, after the painting of the doorframes, after the lamb had been roasted, the Bible says that it was to be eaten in a hurry. They were to eat it fully dressed, with their sandals on, and their walking stick in hand; so that they were ready to move out when the signal was given. The Bible says in verse 29,

*“At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead” (Exodus 12:29-30).*

This wailing and loud weeping arose throughout the land of Egypt like no one had ever heard before, but among the Israelites it was so peaceful that not even a dog barked.

However, it wasn’t too long before Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Get out! Just go, take the Israelites, take your herds and flocks and go!” Even the Egyptian people urged the Israelites to get out thinking that something worse may happen. And so, verse 35 says,

*“The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; and so* *they plundered the Egyptians” (Exodus 12:35-36).*

Today as you and I are following God into the unknown, like the Israelites, we’ve had to let go of some things, and our plans have been interrupted. In fact, my vacation plans were canceled not once, but twice this year, and this summer is nothing like we expected it to be. We don’t know what’s going to happen next, but we need to trust God, allowing him to set our agenda, following his directions, as we move forward into the unknown.

This is what happened to the Israelites, they had to rush out of Egypt in the middle of the night, leaving behind everything they’d known, leaving behind 400 years of history; but it wasn’t going to be a complete loss, because God caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites and give them whatever they asked for. And so, they plundered the Egyptians, coming out of bondage with a lot of stuff, coming out with wealth, coming out with the potential to make a new start, coming out with the ability to put their families in a different socioeconomic position than the generations that preceded them. So, God was bringing them out, he was bringing them into a spacious place, a place of abundance, and the Bible says that,

*“The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds” (Exodus 12:37-38).*

Suddenly, their plans were canceled; work, graduations, and vacations, everything they had hoped for and expected was left behind. They’re on a journey, following God into the unknown, tomorrow was a mystery unfolding, and they’re looking for something, anything to grab hold of, because they didn’t even know what was coming next. But God was teaching them to trust him and follow him without seeing or knowing what’s next and the Bible says in verse 20,

*“After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people” (Exodus 13:20-22).*

And so, this was something entirely new, it’s not just Moses following God, but now the entire nation of Israel is following God. This wasn’t going to be easy, because this was over a million people, possibly 3 million people, but God went ahead of them, guiding them, illuminating the way before them, and protecting them. He led them in a pillar of cloud to protect them from the heat of the sun and by night he led them in a pillar of fire to keep them warm from the cold desert nights. And God was preparing them, he was giving them a new pace or pattern of life, because they had been released from work, their old routines were gone, the kids weren’t going to school anymore, and they were relearning everything that they had known.

God had brought them out of Egypt, but they still needed to break free from those things that they were in bondage to, those things that had satisfied them, those things that they were dependent upon. And so, it was in this process of growing in God, following God, that they were learning to let go of the old so that they were able to receive the new. And that’s why this series is so important, because we’re learning to walk through this season with the Israelites and we’re able to embrace the process being thankful and not fearful.

We have seen this process, there were the frogs, the gnats, the flies and all these plagues God used to set them free. Now as we have been walking with them, Exodus chapter 14 gives us some more detail, a little bit of insight into what happened after they left Egypt. Chapter 14, verse five says,

*“When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds…" (Exodus 14:5).*

And so, there had been 10 plagues, all the firstborn of the nation had died, the people of God left, and just about the time it looks like they’re going to make it to the land flowing with milk and honey. Just when it’s in sight, the Bible says Pharaoh changed his mind and they said,

*“What have we done? We’ve let the Israelites go and have lost their services" (Exodus 14:5).*

And so, now Pharaoh gets out the big guns, he brings out the heavy artillery, and he prepares to attack the very people who are fulfilling God’s purpose for the redemption of mankind. He’s demonically inspired to crush the people of God, attempting to kill the promise of a Deliver, a Savior, that was given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and verse six says,

*“He had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them… and he pursued the Israelites” (Exodus 14:6-8).*

This doesn’t sound good for the Israelites, but God was about to teach them the greatest lesson in their history. He’s setting the stage for a great deliverance which would become part of their identity, part of their worship, part of their songs, part of their reputation among the nations. They were following God into the unknown, they’re not in Egypt, but they’re not in Canaan either. There is so much ahead of them that is unknown, but there were still some things that they needed to let go of, things they needed to have pruned from their lives, things that didn’t serve God’s purpose in this season. You see, God had brought them out of Egypt, but he was still trying to get Egypt out of them. He’s still trying to break Israel from the patterns of bondage that they had known for 400 years.

You see, it’s easy for God to change your heart, he can do that in a moment, because the Bible says:

*“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

And so, it’s not making your heart new that is difficult, it’s getting your habits and desires to come into alignment with the new heart that God gave you that is difficult. When God called Israel out of Egypt, it wasn’t just for a three day journey into the wilderness, but he was calling them out of their lifestyle, out of their way of doing things. You see, the frogs, hail, locusts, and all of that was easy for God; getting Pharaoh to let his people go was easy for God; but the hard thing was for the people to let go of Egypt. They needed to let go of 400 years of history, they needed to let go of what they thought they needed, recognizing that if they have God’s presence, his power, and his provision, that’s all they need.

But they couldn’t receive the good things God has for them now when they refuse to let go of what used to be. And so, the only way for the Israelites to truly walk in freedom was to stop looking back and begin looking forward, anticipating the new things, developing new habits for their newfound freedom. In a sense, they needed to have a funeral, forgetting what is behind and pressing toward what is ahead; not worried about what they’d left behind, not dragging their feet, not worried about what could’ve been, because God was up to something and it wasn’t long before Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and troops overtook them and verse 10 says,

*“The Israelites looked up, (but really they looked back once again, they were still longing for what they left behind, and suddenly) there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (Exodus 14:10-12).*

And so, they’re grumbling and complaining, much like we do when we’ve experienced God’s grace. We’ve seen the miraculous, we know his salvation, and we’ve experienced answered prayers, and then suddenly we come to a place where the future doesn’t look good. We look up and the enemy is behind us and what seems to be an impassable obstacle before us. In fact, the past looks so much better because the future looks very threatening in the midst of concerns about COVID-19, the economy, and government requirements. And so, there is sunshine behind us and storm clouds in front of us. The future is dark and ominous, it seems like this is the end, there is no way to get through this, but they needed to remember, like we need to remember what God has done.

You see, they’d just been called out of Egypt, delivered from oppression, and had just experienced this great miracle of God. For the lamb had been slain, the blood was spilled, the death Angel had passed over, and it’s such a beautiful picture of our redemption. Israel came out rejoicing, full of praise, their dreams had finally come true, but their celebrations were short-lived because they began looking back and longing for what they’d left behind. And it was as they were looking back toward Egypt that they saw Pharaoh’s chariots approaching and fear kicked in. They told Moses, “It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” But Moses tells them,

*“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exodus 14:13-14).*

In other words, Moses said, if God brought you to this, he intends to bring you through it. You see, God didn’t do all of those miracles, the signs and wonders, and the ten plagues, only to abandon them on the shore of the Red Sea.

I want to encourage you and let you know that you don’t have to be afraid of the Red Sea or whatever it is you’re facing today. You see, God didn’t intend for your life to end here, he’s not going to allow you to drown in the Red Sea, he’s not going to allow you to be overcome by that problem, fear, or concern. And so, Moses said, “Don’t be afraid, stand firm, if he brought you to it, he intends to bring you through it.” You may not have a solution, you don’t have a boat, maybe you don’t know how to swim, but no matter what you’re facing today, God has a plan, he’s working in all things, and if you’ve been called according to his purpose he has a way to get you out.

In fact, I believe that many of you are recognizing right now, there is something deep in your spirit that says there has to be a way out, you may not see it but you know that he is the way maker. Your faith is rising right now, because you know that God didn’t send the ten plagues, he didn’t draw you out of Egypt, he didn’t deliver you from oppression, so that there would be a funeral on the shore of the Red Sea. And so, I want to encourage you to believe that you’ll make it through this water, you’ll make it through this obstacle, but Pharaoh won’t, fear won’t, failure won’t, because Moses said,

*“The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exodus 14:14).*

And so, God may be calling you to step out of your comfort zone to stand firm in faith. Some of you, if you have to go into the water it’s because God is going to give you a bath, he is cleansing you, he is purifying you, but you can’t follow God into the unknown without taking risks. In fact, the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 11,

*“Without faith it is impossible to please God…” (Hebrews 11:6).*

And so, I want to encourage you if God brought you to this, he’ll bring you through it.

As we close, I believe somebody needs to hear this, God didn’t bring you here to drown you, but to drown your enemy. You will get through this. As you’re standing there on the shore looking at the sea before you with the enemy behind you, God is calling you to take a leap of faith, believing with all of your heart that if God is in this, there is no power that can stop you. You will live and not die. You will see the goodness of God in the land of the living. For the Lord said,

*“I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV)*

Let’s pray together.

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