

The High Cost of Deliverance

As we noted last Sunday, in Moses' dramatic call experience of the burning bush 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 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, a nearly impossible demand. 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. With each plague Pharaoh refused to release the Israelites. The tenth and final plague, the death of the firstborn, was the one that finally broke, at least momentarily, the stubborn will of Pharaoh. Before this final plague, the Lord instituted the feast of the Passover, which was to become the annual and most important observance of the Jews.

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

“The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ² This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴ If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶ You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷ They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸ They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰ You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹ This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. ¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴ This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to

the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.”
This is the word of the Lord.

As a nation we know the high cost of deliverance from dictatorships in past wars, and even now our President and other world leaders are considering the cost of deliverance from ISIS’ ruthless aggression.

The deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt came at a high cost—the death of the firstborn in every Egyptian household. This deliverance of God’s enslaved people was celebrated with a meal called the Passover, which continues to be a celebration crucial to the identity and life of the Jewish people. 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 worship service we’ll remember this deliverance as we observe the Lord’s Supper.

Pharaoh reluctantly allowed the Israelites to leave only 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.

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.

We praise God for the cost he paid for our deliverance. 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. God’s love and care are always with us, and the cost he paid for our deliverance is a guarantee of all we need now and 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.

God chose and called Moses to be the human instrument of his deliverance of his people, who could only trust. There was nothing they could do to "help God out." We too would be lost and helpless in our sinful condition apart from God's grace through Christ. 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 self-centered lives. 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).

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).

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 delivered his people from the death angel and guided them to the Promised Land. But God's purpose was not primarily to deliver them from one place 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. 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. We too must be ready to obey and follow Christ 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, including sharing in his sufferings. But when we follow Jesus, we have the promise of his grace and the blessing of his peace, even through the dark valleys. 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 better enable us to serve him (Romans 8:28f).

North Korea leads the world in the persecution of Christians. Some years ago a courageous follower of Jesus said, “We North Korean Christians are like nails. The harder they hit us, the deeper we go.” 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.

Deliverance is free but not cheap. Today we 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). Jesus pointed to himself as the true Passover 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 through his self-sacrifice. It was substitution. Christ carried our sins, suffered in our place, somewhat like Father Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish Franciscan, a prisoner in the

Auschwitz concentration camp. "When a number of prisoners were selected for execution, and one of them shouted that he was a married man with children, Father Kolbe stepped forward and asked if he could take the condemned man's place. His offer was accepted by the authorities, and he was placed in an underground cell, where he was left to die of starvation" (John RW Stott). Jesus died in our place, that we might be free and have life everlasting in his kingdom. Today, when we share the Lord's Supper, let's remember that it's the Eucharist, the thanksgiving, gratitude feast, as we give thanks for the price paid to set us free.

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. 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 newcomers who were willing to enter this covenant of blood and Passover joined themselves with God's people (12:38,48f). And today, we invite all here today, adults and children, who accept Jesus' sacrifice and seek to follow him as Lord.