

Sermon Given by

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At the Morning Services on 8th November 2009

Exodus 12:31-13:16 - "A night to remember"

Since the conflict began in 2001 a total of 230 British servicemen and women have been killed in Afghanistan – 93 of them in this year alone.

For their friends and family I guess every day is a remembrance day – a day of tears, a day of “what ifs” and “if onlys”, a day of looking at photographs of their loved one, a day of clinging on to the memory of the fallen - of refusing to forget.

Today though, Remembrance Sunday is a special day for all of us to honour the dead - to remember those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in seeking to win, secure and maintain the freedom we enjoy today. It's right to do this.

And we have a number of rituals, don't we, to help us remember. We read out the names of those men from this village who gave their lives in WW1 and WW2, we lay a wreath, we observe a minute's silence, many of us wear a poppy. Little acts, signs, symbols to help us as a congregation – as a nation even, to remember.

For God's people in the OT they too had a day of remembrance in fact chapter 12:15 that you were looking at last week, it wasn't a day of remembrance but a week of remembrance and it too was full of rituals. They knew that they needed to remember what had happened to them on that one particular night – the night of the Passover. It was so important, so central that they must not forget it.

I want to draw 3 themes for us out of this passage – 3 things to remember.

First is this – **Remember what God has done for us**

At the Passover God did for the Israelites what they couldn't do for themselves. He saved them. God was utterly sovereign in their redemption and this is made clear to us in the text again and again.

A verse from last week 12:17 ***“Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread...”*** Why were they to do this? Was it because they had achieved their own rescue? No, 12:17 ***“Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I (The LORD) brought your divisions out of Egypt.”***

The Lord was sovereign over all the details of the Passover. For example it was the Lord 12:36 who ***“had made the Egyptians favourably disposed towards the people...”*** (so that they not only let them leave) but back to v36 ***“gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.”*** Taking the wages they fully deserved for their years of slavery.

In chapter 13 we continue to see this emphasis on the fact that God rescued them. He did it and in particular we see a recurring phrase.

13:3 “Then Moses said to the people, ‘Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the Lord brought you out of it with a mighty hand.’”

13:9 “This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the Lord is to be on your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand.”

That phrase comes again in v14 and v16 – **“the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand.”**

The Lord did it – He achieved it. As for God’s people then with the Passover so it’s the same for God’s people today through the event to which the Passover pointed – the Cross – the Cross where Jesus our Passover Lamb – a lamb without blemish or defect - shed his blood that we, through trusting in him might be rescued from God’s wrath.

Our salvation was God’s work – He did it and we must remember this not least because remembering this will liberate us to live a joy-filled life of gratitude and obedience.

I don’t know if you’ve seen the film “Saving Private Ryan”? It’s set in WW2 and it’s about a group of men who are given orders to rescue a single man from behind enemy lines in Normandy.

We’re told that his 3 brothers have all recently been killed in action, leaving him as the only child of a single mother. When the US Army Chief of Staff hears about the situation, he gives orders to protect this precious remaining son, Private James Ryan and send out a team of soldiers to bring him back alive.

The rescue mission is extremely perilous. And one by one it claims the soldiers lives. At one point their captain says, “This Ryan, he’d better be worth it; he’d better go home, cure some disease or invent the longer-lasting light bulb.”

But the orders to rescue Ryan are obeyed and in the final battle scene set on a heavily shelled bridge, as the captain himself dies, he whispers his last words to a dumbstruck James Ryan: “James, earn this, earn it!”

50 years pass and in the closing shots of the film, we see an elderly James Ryan returning to Normandy with his wife, children and grandchildren. He kneels beside the grave of the Captain and as tears fill his eyes he says: “My family is with me today and every day I think of what you said to me that day on the bridge. I’ve tried to live my life the best I could. I hope that was enough. I hope that at least in your eyes I have earned what all have you have done for me?”

Then he turns to his wife and asks with some anxiety: “Tell me I’ve led a good life, tell me I’m a good man.”

In a way those last words of the captain “earn it” have crippled him. Could he ever live up to the deaths of those young men - could he ever earn it? Private Ryan has led his entire life with the words of his rescuer ringing in his ear. The Captain’s last words were “earn it.”

How different that is from the last words of the great Rescuer, Jesus our Passover Lamb. His last words as recorded in John 19:30 are in stark contrast. As he died to rescue us he said this: **“it is finished.”**

They too are dying words that have the power to affect the course of a life. “It is finished” cried Jesus, it’s done, it’s complete. This was an exclamation of triumph, of achievement.

So as he dies, Jesus doesn’t say to me: “earn it Tony, earn it”. He says: “Tony, it’s finished, your sin – past, present and future, it’s all forgiven. You’re safe from God’s wrath because my saving work is complete – it’s done, it’s finished – there’s nothing that you need to or can add to it. It is finished. I can’t earn my salvation, I can’t pay for it, I’ve done nothing to deserve it but Christ our Passover Lamb died for his people to pay for our sin. And knowing this key, this central truth liberates us to live the life of faith with joy. We don’t have to be constantly worrying about whether we’re good enough, whether we’ve done enough. Jesus has done it all. It is finished.

Exodus 13:16 – the end of the verse: **“the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand.”** Our salvation, our rescue was God’s work from start to finish. Remember what God has done for us and rejoice in it. And part of what God has done for us is to rescue us as a people.

That’s our second point: **Remember who you are – part of God’s people**

On that Passover night, God rescued a people, not just individuals and this night of the Exodus was a key moment when his people came into being. That old old promise to Abraham that God would make him into a great people was being fulfilled. Look down at 12:37 where we read: **“The Israelites journeyed from Ramases to Succoth. There were about 600,000 men on foot, besides women and children.”**

70 Israelites had first gone down to Egypt and now God was bringing up out of Egypt 600,000 men and including the women and children the total figure would have been around 2 million.

V40 **“Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord’s divisions left Egypt.”**

God had saved them as a people and notice how that community was to be defined by the Passover. In 12:43-49 God gives them these detailed instructions on how they were to celebrate the Passover.

And it’s striking isn’t it that these detailed instructions on how to commemorate the event in the future are given before the actual event takes place!

That's how God operates again and again in Scripture. We're so slow to understand God's deeds that he explains them to us in advance and repeatedly just as earlier in the book he kept telling Moses about the plagues (I think it was x8) before they happened.

In the Bible God's deeds are sandwiched by his words. He speaks, He acts, he speaks again.

It's just the same with Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper before he went to the Cross. The Lord's Supper is the equivalent for us of the Passover celebrations. For the Christian the Lord's Supper is the great symbol, the great commemorative act of what God has done to save us. And as we eat the bread and drink the wine, we're identifying ourselves with God's people. It's an outward marker to identify the people of God. That's why 12:43, no foreigner was to eat the Passover or for us why no non-Xn should share in the Lord's Supper. Which is why from time to time at Communion we give a warning that those who don't yet know and love the Lord Jesus should not take the bread and the wine. They can come forward for a prayer – that's fine but they should not share in the meal – that's for God's people alone.

We're saved as part of a people and as God gave the OT believers a meal to share together so he gives us a meal to share together to express together and to remember together what Christ our Passover lamb has done for us.

I don't often cry at church; I can think of a few occasions when I have but it's not that often. I do frequently well up though – sometimes when the words of a song or the words in a sermon hit home in my life but most often I well up as I share Communion and am struck once again by the sheer enormity of God's amazing grace – of Christ's incredible love in laying down his life.

The Lord's Supper is a multi-sensory reminder of God's saving grace in Christ. And it's not just a reminder. The lamb didn't just save the Israelites at the Passover by its shed blood; it fed the Israelites – they roasted it and ate it. As we eat the bread and drink the wine we don't feed physically on Christ – that would be abhorrent and bizarre but we do feed spiritually on Christ our Passover Lamb by faith.

Remember what God has done for us, remember who you are and lastly **Remember that you belong to the Lord and so dedicate yourself to Him**

13:1 ***'The Lord said to Moses, "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal."***

Moses then relays this to the people so we read a few verses on v11: ***"After the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your forefathers, you are to give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the Lord."***

The consequence of belonging to the Lord is that we owe our lives to the Lord. At the Exodus all the firstborn survivors owed their lives to God for he had provided them with a substitute – so of course their new life out of slavery, out of death belonged to the Lord.

As for them so for us redemption from sin and death brings consecration to God. What are we going to do with the life that we've been given out of death – it doesn't belong to us but to Christ our Redeemer – and those who have grasped what Christ has done for them will delight to live their lives for Him for His pleasure, for His glory. For the truly converted person life will never be the same again.

One of my earliest memories is watching the Royal Navy Task Force leaving Portsmouth Harbour to go and take back the Falklands. 253 of those men never made it back. One of them was Sergeant Ian Mckai - one of two men to be awarded the VC in that war.

Mckai was part of 3rd Parachute regiment – one of the regiments that led the big rush to get to Port Stanley and victory. But on the journey there 3 Para met an Argentinian gun post on Mt Longden that halted their progress. 3 Para were exposed on the hillside and were under heavy fire. The situation was looking grim; several men had already been killed and with his platoon commander shot in the leg Mckai took over command. His men were trapped and were slowly being picked off. Mckai realised that if something wasn't done soon they were all going to be killed. And so in an act of great courage and self sacrifice he jumped up, threw down his rifle, took two grenades off his chest webbing, pulled out the pins and charged up the hillside. There was a great explosion and then the firing ceased. McKai's body was found slumped over the edge of the gun post. Mackai's men were facing death but he died that they might live. A substitute was provided for those men in 3 Para that they might live.

And Jesus death was a bit like that of Ian McKai's – and yet far more amazing, far more wonderful. We deserve the punishment that Jesus took on the Cross. We deserve to face G's anger for the way we've treated G. But God in his great mercy and love has provided a substitute. Jesus, so to speak took the full blast of G's anger that we through trusting in Him might be saved.

That is how much God loves us that He should send His Son, His one and only Son, whom He loves to die for us.

Those men in 3 Para were indebted to Ian McKai – could they have just smoked a fag and then forgotten all about him? No, of course they couldn't - they owed him their lives because he had saved them.

Jesus has saved us and we owe him our lives – we belong not to ourselves but to Christ – we're not our own property but his.

And that's why we live differently and distinctively as Christians. Did you notice in 13:3-16 how the life of the Israelites household was designed to illicit enquiry from children. Did you spot that in v8 and v14?

And it's not hard to imagine the scene is it. Dad comes home from work one day with a lamb. The lamb lives with your family – becomes like a household pet, much loved and treasured and then one day dad takes a sharp knife and slits its throat. That would be bound to bring some enquiry from the kids. "Why dad, why?" Or at breakfast the kids notice that the bread is solid and dense – "Why mum, why?"

And isn't that the same today for the children of believers as they notice how their family does things differently to other families.

“Granny, why is it that you and grandpa spend so long reading that tatty old copy of the Bible – what’s so special about it?” or “Dad, why do we give so much of our money away?” or “Mum, why do we so often have people round for meals?”

Why do we live distinctive lives as believers? What’s the answer? V8 ***“On that day tell your son, ‘I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’”***

Isn’t that great! Why do we live distinctive lives? Because of what God has done for us. Because God sent his Son to die for us – that’s what has made the difference. It’s not to gain God’s favour – they don’t say that – no, the answer they give is because of what God has done for us. With a mighty hand God has broken into our lives, he saved us and now nothing can be the same again. That’s why we’re different – we can’t live like the others because God’s mighty hand has saved us.

Audio versions of the sermons can be freely downloaded from the All Saints Little Shelford website, <http://www.allsaintslittleshelford.org>. These are available in two formats, mp3 and wma.

(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)