

**A Nation is Born  
Exodus 12:14-28  
April 6, 2014**

**Introduction – Birth Pangs**

I'm not the best person to introduce this topic. The fact that I'm a man puts me at a distinct disadvantage. I can only speak of the birth process as an observer. And even though I witnessed the birth of both my children and my first grandchild, I know my limitations. I got myself in a lot of trouble while Diane was in labor with our first child, so I know I'm on dangerous ground here. The birth of your first child is such an amazing experience! You know, you get the camera ready to capture those precious memories. But let me just offer a hint to those men who have not yet witnessed the birth of their first child. Don't take a picture of your wife while she's in transition. You probably don't know what "transition" is. But you'll know it when it happens; trust me. Anyway, we've got a picture of Diane somewhere as she's in intense labor with Meredith. But you'll never see it. Most married guys know what "the look" is from your wife. Multiply that by 100. Trust me. That's one picture you don't want to take.

Giving birth is a difficult process. And while it turns out fine most of the time, there are no guarantees it will be without complications. Every birth is a miracle. In the same way, the birth of any nation is fraught with great pain and danger. That certainly was the case with the beginning of the United States. Of course, just as a woman carries a baby for nine months, there also was a long period of gestation prior to the birth of our nation. Mother England never really wanted to have a baby in America, but it was her own fault. She wasn't careful and pushed the boundaries of taxation and oppression until the seeds of rebellion and secession were planted in the hearts of the colonists. England was abusing us and the people began to long for freedom. The two forces of oppression and the inborn longing for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" conceived the idea of a new nation on the American continent. I love to read stories of our nation's beginning. My favorite book is *The Light and the Glory* by Peter Marshall where God's intervening hand is wonderfully explained and documented. After eight long years of brutal war and the death or disablement of nearly 50,000 men, our country was finally birthed with great sacrifice. And now, more than two hundred years later, we still remember our founding fathers. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States

remain the ruling documents of our society. We even have a national holiday when we all remember together and reflect on the great cost and value of our freedom.

But as great and wonderful as the birth of our nation was, there is no greater story in the history of man than when the nation of Israel was dramatically born out of the grip of slavery in Egypt. Prior to that day, the descendants of Israel – who was first named Jacob – were just a big family of nearly a million people. They had no founding documents, no land, and no national identity. They had come to Egypt 400 years earlier by God’s providence to escape a famine. But after only one generation of favor, they became enslaved by the Egyptians to do the hard work of the powerful kingdom. Many of the rich architectural treasures of the land, including some of the pyramids were built on the backs of Jacob’s family. But in God’s time, he raised up a remarkable deliverer in the meek and humble man, Moses.

Through Moses, the word of the Lord came to the Pharaoh: “Let my people go.” Of course, the ruler refused because he valued the free labor that he had come to depend on. To demonstrate that God was Lord over all the gods of Egypt, he sent ten plagues to torment the obstinate ruler. The tenth was the worst and by the time it was over, the Egyptians were relieved to let them go.

The final plague was the killing of all the first-born in Egypt, both animal and human. (Exodus 11:4-8). The plague, however, did not touch God’s people, as he provided a sign that the children of Israel used so that the Angel of Death would “pass over” their house and spare their first-born. God’s instructions to his people were to take a lamb without blemish and to kill it. Then they were to take some of the lamb’s blood and spread it on the doorpost and lintels of their house. When the Angel of Death visited the land of Egypt that night, he would not touch the house where the blood was applied. All of this sounds so familiar to most of us today, but remember, the children of Israel had never done such a thing before. They knew nothing of a sacrificial lamb. They did not understand the power of the blood.

After the Angel of Death visited the land of Egypt, there arose such a wail of mourning from the people because there was not a house where someone was not dead. Pharaoh finally relented and let the people go. So powerful was God’s hand with his people, that the Egyptians even filled

their wagons with silver and gold and clothing. And so they “plundered” their oppressors, in the words of Scripture. However, God was not done yet. After the people left the land, Pharaoh changed his mind and sent his army out to bring them back. But God parted the Red Sea for his new nation to cross and then closed the waters back on the Egyptians. After 430 years of slavery and oppression, God birthed the nation of Israel with a mighty hand. The Passover was the forming event for the nation and God wanted his people to never forget.

**Text – Exodus 12:14-28 (ESV)**

“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.”

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the

sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

### **The Importance of Remembering**

Special days of remembrance are important in our lives. Beyond the fireworks and barbecues of Independence Day, the Fourth of July reconnects us to our national story and values. Polarized as we are, it is one day out of the year that we come together as a unified nation to remember.

Birthdays are important, too. We rejoice in the blessing of the celebrated one's life. And pity the husband or wife that forgets an anniversary. Ever done that? I did. Once. But that's OK... so did Diane. Fortunately, it was the same year.

We remember in the church, too. We have our special days: Christmas, Holy Week and Easter, Pentecost, and recently, we've added All Saints Day at First Baptist. Why do we do that? It keeps us connected to the Story. It reminds us that we are part of God's plan that has been taking shape since the beginning of time.

The idea of holy days of remembrance did not begin with the church; God instituted them with our forebears, the people of Israel. And Passover was the first special day of remembrance that God instituted for his people. The text that we read makes God's plan and intention very clear. And it is critical that we – 4,000 year later – understand what God was doing when he commanded the feast of Passover forever for every generation of the Jewish people. He said, “You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service.” It was the Passover, the miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt that formed the nation of Israel. Two hundred years, five hundred years or a thousand years from the actual event, the children of Israel would once again experience their deliverance from oppression and slavery as they partook of the Passover meal. When Gideon, Samuel, King David, the prophets, Ezra and

Nehemiah partook of the meal, they were experiencing in solidarity what their forefathers experienced in Egypt hundreds or thousands of years before. It was not just a factual recalling of the event with their mind, remembering by partaking of the Passover meal was actually experiencing deliverance from oppression in Egypt. It's called "active remembering." The past becomes present in the participant's life.

We've just had opening day for baseball season this week. Do you remember the film, "Field of Dreams?" Kevin Costner built a baseball field on his farm in Iowa with the expectation that "if you build it, they will come." It was an entertaining movie by many accounts, but a mysterious one as well. He did "build it" and they did come. They, of course, being the disgraced ball players from the 1919 Chicago White Sox team who were accused of intentionally losing the series to collect money from gambling interests. Here they were, ball players in their early to mid-twenties who had lived nearly a century before showing up to play ball in an Iowa cornfield. The past became present.

That's "active remembering." That's what the Jews would do every year as they celebrated Passover. When they ate the meal, they were participating once again in the events that birthed their nation hundreds or thousands of years before. ...So that they would remember. So that they would remember that they were a redeemed people. So that they would always remember that God birthed them as a people out of slavery with a mighty hand.

### **Christian Parallels**

Now when Christ came, he redefined everything. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law and Prophets. As we said last week, he took the place of the Temple. No longer would God's people go to the mount in Jerusalem to meet with him. Heaven and earth now meet in the person of Jesus Christ. Profoundly, and powerfully, Christ also redefined Passover. As John the Baptist said, Christ was the "Lamb of God" who was killed at Passover. Indeed, the "Last Supper" was instituted as a Passover meal. The bread and wine of the meal he redefined as his body and blood given for us. In I Corinthians 5:7, the Apostle Paul declared, "...Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed."

Do you understand? Christ is our Passover. Just as the Jews were delivered from the oppression of slavery in Egypt through the Passover, so we are now ultimately delivered from the oppression of sin and death through Christ - his death and resurrection.

Next week, a representative from Jews for Jesus will be here to lead us in a Passover Seder meal. In that presentation, she will clearly show how Christ is represented in the elements and observance of a Jewish Passover, foreshadowing his ultimate fulfillment of the feast. I've arranged for us to observe the Lord's Table after her presentation because I want us to make the powerful connection between Passover and our observance of Communion. (That's why we're not observing Communion this Sunday.) I hope that you will plan to be here next week.

If Passover celebrated the birth of the Jewish nation, then the new Passover, Christ's death and resurrection is the birth of a new nation – what Peter calls, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9). That's us. Can you say, “Amen?” A “hallelujah” may be even more appropriate. And that is what we celebrate at the Lord's Table, which we will do next Sunday and then again on Maundy Thursday.

Today's message has been a time of teaching. We need to be taught. We need to learn so that we might grow:

- The event celebrated at a Jewish Passover was God's mighty hand of deliverance that birthed the nation of Israel.
- When the Jews celebrate and remember Passover, they once again experience their deliverance from oppression in Egypt.
- Jesus redefined the Passover as his own death and resurrection which delivers us from the oppression of sin and death.
- When we observe the Lord's Table, we once again experience our deliverance through the death and resurrection of Christ and the birth of God's new holy nation – the church.

### **Birthing Process in Your Life – Making Exodus Personal**

Those are the principles that I want you to remember from today. But I also want us to reflect a moment on God's deliverance as demonstrated through the Exodus and ultimately, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I want you to take it to heart – to make it personal.

Knute and I just returned from a pastor's retreat at Camp Judson this week. Pray for pastors, friends. Virtually every one of the men and women who attended the retreat was broken in some way. As we opened our hearts to one another, there were lots of tears and prayers lifted to the throne of grace. I almost felt guilty. Aside from a bit of winter weariness, I'm in a good place. If that is true of pastors, I know that it is true of you as well. All across this room there are broken people. I don't know why. Many of you – perhaps most – are broken through no fault of your own. You're experiencing the reality and toughness of life. Perhaps it's a health issue...or a financial one. You may have a child who is breaking your heart. There may be other relational issues that tearing you up.

Have you ever considered that God's people were oppressed in Egypt through no fault of their own? They weren't there because they were being disciplined. In the providence of God, they went there to escape famine and became enslaved by an oppressive king. There is evil in this world and they simply became victims of the world's brokenness. All of us are victims of an oppressive world. But as surely as God was able to deliver his people with a mighty hand out of Egypt, he can deliver you. Do not doubt that. It may be today, it may be ten years from now. But look to God in faith for your deliverance. If he could divide the waters of the Red Sea, surely he can deliver you from your oppression and sorrow.

But some of you are broken because of the poor choices you have made. You're wrestling with sin and it is mastering you. You're under the oppressive slave master's hand and can't get free. You too, must look to God alone for your deliverance. Jesus has provided the path of escape from the oppression of sin, but you must apply it. Just as the ancient Jews painted the blood of a lamb on the doorposts and lintel of their house; so you, too, must apply the blood of Jesus Christ by faith on the door of your heart. It is as simple as admitting your helplessness in your bondage to sin and cry out in faith, believing that Jesus died for you...

We began this message talking about birth pangs. Today can be a day of new birth for you as well. If you've never trusted Christ to deliver you, let this be the day that you are born again – delivered from the oppression of sin and death and covered by the blood of Christ. If you are weary and broken by the oppression that so often burdens us in this life, today can be the birth of a renewed faith as you look to Christ to deliver you. If God did it before and he did it for other people, he can do it today and he will do it for you!

**Benediction – Adapted from Hebrews 7:25**

[Christ] is able to save [you] to the uttermost [if you] draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for [you].