

The Exodus

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 0 0] Many of you, I'm sure, have been following with interest what's been happening in Hong Kong. Over the last, I think, 10 or so weeks, there's been ongoing protests and civil unrest.

Now, in case you didn't know, in 1997, the British handed Hong Kong back to China. And under a 50-year arrangement, the Hong Kong people enjoy freedoms and rights not afforded to other citizens elsewhere in China.

It is what is coined one country, two systems. But increasingly, over the last few years, the people have become unhappy because they perceive their freedoms being chipped away.

The latest unrest are the result of the Hong Kong government, perhaps under the direction of Beijing, trying to pass laws which would allow people wanted in China to be extradited from Hong Kong.

Now, I know that this is sort of, things are getting pretty heated, so much so that I even saw a program today where students, and you going to university, students at uni between Chinese and the Hong Kong students, things have got pretty heated and perhaps a bit violent as well.

[1 : 1 7] So do pray for that situation. And if you're a Christian from either China or Hong Kong, and you're on campus, then please do the best you can to be a peacemaker.

Now, I don't want to get into the rights and wrongs of all this, but I want to say that no one really should be surprised at what's been happening because as people, we all have an innate thirst for freedom.

We don't want our lives dictated to what we can or can't do, who we can or can't associate with, even what we can or can't say in public.

And we see this not just in Hong Kong, but across the world as well, in the Middle East, in Africa, and then if you go further back in history, Europe and America as well.

So the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of slavery in America, on the slide there, Braveheart, maybe even Independence Day.

[2 : 2 2] Stole that one from last week from Andrew. Although that probably didn't happen, did it? We didn't get taken over by aliens. But anyway, someone this morning said, not yet. Well, today, in our next installment of Exodus, we see Israel getting a taste of its own freedom.

But unlike the other freedom movements, this is achieved without protest marches or armed conflict. This is achieved solely by the hand of God, as we've seen over the last few weeks.

And in the first section, which Helen read for us, we are given an account of what finally happened. And I'd like to just bring out two things from that passage, which you see in your outline.

The first is the nature of God's victory, which is complete and overwhelming. Pharaoh is no longer arrogant like he was before. He's a desperate and defeated figure.

So desperate that he drives Israel out on the very night that the firstborn are killed. Even as every Egyptian household is wailing from that loss, including his, he's commanding Israel to go.

[3 : 37] So he summons Moses and Aaron and pleads for them to go. There's no more bargaining, no more trying to salvage something from a bad situation. If you remember earlier, he was saying things like, oh, you know, you want to sacrifice to God?

Yeah, go and do it, but do it in the land. Or later on, you want to go? Fine, but only the men, not the children or women. Well, there's no more of that.

Just go, he says. Up was the, you know, abruptness in which he said that. But then he says rather cheekily, bless me too, which is the cheek of him, having opposed God all this time, now to say, bless me.

Likewise, verse 33, the people of Egypt urged the people to hurry and leave, or else they fear, or would die, not just the firstborn. And when asked in verse 35, they were only too glad to give the Israelites articles of silver and gold and clothing, because it says there that the Lord made them so predisposed.

But I want you to notice that at the end of verse 36, how all this is described is that of plundering the Egyptians. If you look down in verse 41, it says that the Lord's divisions left Egypt.

[4 : 59] And while they did, the Lord kept vigil like a sentinel. In other words, this is a military victory. God's victorious army is leaving the battlefield victorious, taking with them the spoils of war, and all without a shot, although they didn't have guns then, not all without a weapon used.

Now the second aspect of this narrative is the haste. It came the very night of the Passover, as I said. You know, they didn't even wait until the morning when it was safer to travel, but they departed in the night with dough in hand or on their shoulders, without yeast, because there was no time to prepare food for themselves.

But juxtaposed against this are the verses of 40 to 42. For that says, now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years.

At the end of the 430 years, to this very day, all the Lord's divisions left Egypt, because the Lord kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt. On this night, all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the Lord for the generations to come.

This hasty departure was actually 430 years in the making. God had been preparing for this for a long time and bringing it to pass just as He intended.

[6 : 33] In fact, He already promised to Abraham in Genesis 15 and verse 13, which I've got on the slide, know for certain that for 400 years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there.

But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions. Now, some of you might have tweaked why 400 here and 430 back in Exodus.

I think the difference is the difference in time between Joseph coming to Egypt himself, by himself, and then about 30 years later Jacob and the rest of the family coming.

But because God kept vigil over Israel that night, He now says for them to keep vigil each year on this very night in order to honor God for what He did.

And this is done by celebrating the Passover. to remind them of the price of freedom. For you see, Israel's freedom wasn't achieved by the signs and wonders of the plagues.

[7 : 40] Their freedom was actually achieved by the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. And if you were here last week, Andrew explained the lamb was the substitute for the firstborn.

Death falls on the lamb instead of the punishment for sin falling on the firstborn and then the family being spared of that. And the blood of the lamb painted over the door, well, that was the thing that distinguished between an Israelite and an Egyptian household.

Without that blood, Israel would have suffered the same fate as the Egyptians. Israel's victory, then, is secured by the Passover.

Passover. And if you look at these few chapters, I think it's being reinforced by the way the narrative is arranged. So if you look on the slide, you'll see that in chapter 11, we had the plague of the firstborn.

Then chapter 12, we moved last week to the Passover. And then now, we have the Exodus. But then what happens next is that we return to, in the next section, the Passover again.

[8 : 48] And then finally, we have the consecration of the firstborn. So we have firstborn, Passover, Exodus, then Passover, firstborn again. So what's happening is that the Exodus itself is being sandwiched between the Passover and the firstborn sections as a way of reminding Israel how important the Passover lamb and the sparing of the firstborn is to their freedom.

The lamb was the substitute for their firstborn. It took the punishment for them the night the Lord came through Egypt. His judgment passed over them with the blood on the door.

Israel is no less sinful than Egypt, no less deserving of punishment. The only difference was the lamb. Now, I belabor this point because I want to draw a connection here with stuff that's happening in the New Testament.

If you read certain authors and theologians, some of them would be arguing, some of them do argue that today, they argue that the cross of Jesus isn't about penal substitution.

I'll explain that a bit more in a minute. The reason is that they find it hard to believe that a loving God would forgive sinners by punishing his perfect son instead.

[10 : 13] Now, this view is what is technically called penal substitutionary atonement, PSA in your outline. Penal meaning punishment, substitutionary meaning substitute, and atonement meaning making peace with God.

Instead, they argue that Jesus died simply to free us from evil. evil. He rescued us from the clutches of the devil. Only that. And they would point to the miracles of Jesus to sort of demonstrate this.

Or they would point to verses like the next one, Colossians 2, verse 15. Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Now, this view in the outline I've written is called the Christus Victor view, or Christus Victor view of atonement. Christus being Latin for Christ in the nominative.

So, Christ as Victor. And if you read the Bible, there's no doubt that it gives a picture of Christ as Victor. But you also see parallels of the connection between this and PSA in the Exodus and the Passover.

[11 : 29] Passover. Just as the Exodus is secured by the Passover, so Christ's victory over evil is secured by his substitutionary death on the cross.

You get that when you read the rest of the New Testament. But the reason I raise it here is because it's so clearly prefigured in the Exodus as well. that's why I think that when they commemorate their freedom each year, they don't go out and walk about with dough in their hands to reenact the Exodus.

That's not what they do. What they do instead is they observe the Passover. Now, you might be thinking, well, this all sounds rather dull.

You know, what's the point of this all? The reason I raise this is that I don't think this is a purely intellectual argument, but rather that an important doctrine here has huge practical implications.

You see, if you only believe in Christus Victor, then salvation is all about freedom from systemic evil, right? Evil is out there, external to us, and the focus becomes freeing people from injustice, addictions, you know, all manner of societal ills.

[12 : 48] But without PSA, what we neglect to do then is call people to repentance, to help them to see that even if they are victims of evil, like Israel was, they still need saving from their own sin.

They still need a substitute, Jesus, to take their place on the cross. We are firstly sinners before a holy God, before we are crusaders fighting for Jesus against evil.

evil. Now, if you don't believe how prevalent this error is, I just urge you to go and read Christian articles, magazines, you know, from various church denominations with that lens in mind, and see how often you actually find people talking about Jesus as a substitute.

It's not very common, sadly. but if PSA is true, and what the Bible says, what the Bible says is that it is, then one of the key tasks for us as a church, it's not the only task, but a key task is to call people to repentance.

In other words, to evangelize. Every other ministry or good work of the church is a result of it, not a substitute for it. And I know sort of asking people to repent is sort of really hard nowadays, isn't it?

[14 : 09] I mean, I react when people ask me to repent, so we know how it feels to ask others to repent. But the fact is, unless we do that, people are not truly free.

You might free everyone from whatever addiction they may have, alcohol, drugs, or whatever, but unless they come to Christ in repentance, they do not have true freedom, the freedom that God wants to give them.

Now, when we turn to the next section, verses 43 to 50, what we see now is that, yes, it's only certain people that benefit from the Passover. Only those who are truly saved, that is God's covenant people, can join in the Passover.

And the sign of God's covenant people is that of circumcision. So if you look at verse 43, it says, no foreigner may eat it, any slave may eat it, but only after you have circumcised him.

Not a temporary resident or a hard worker. Later in verse 48, if a foreigner wants to celebrate, then all the males in his household must be circumcised first.

[15 : 20] But once they are, the Bible says they're just like one born in the land, that is they're just like any other Israelite. So clearly, only the circumcised can eat.

Now these regulations here, not just for the first, but for every other Passover, including those that they celebrate in the land. And so you have to ask in one sense, why have all these restrictions?

Why in verse 46 do you only eat it in the house? Why the whole community eating it together? Because after all, if it's just to remember the Exodus, why do we restrict people from joining into it, joining in on it?

For example, nowadays, we don't stop people who are not Australians, who didn't fight on the side of the Anzacs, from standing and observing two-minute silence, do we?

On Anzac Day. Anyone can do that. Or if you're in America, and you're not an American, you get invited to Thanksgiving, don't you? They'll say, come, tuck into the turkey, even though you're not American.

[16 : 23] But here, only the Israelites can eat. Why? Well, I think it's because the Passover isn't just a remembrance event. Yes, a big part of it is remembering, as we saw last week, but it's also participation.

That is, as they eat the Passover, they're joining in, they're saying, I want this great act of deliverance for me as well. They're saying, we may not have been there, but we want to have the benefit of it.

And in fact, we do benefit from it, because of what God has done. And therefore, we want to honor God for it, by keeping vigil. By eating it, they acknowledge that all the blessings and inheritance they now enjoy in the land, which God promised to Abraham, is possible because of God's redemption of their forefathers from the land of Egypt.

But only God's covenant people get to inherit those blessings. Now, if you're a foreigner who's already living in the land, then in one sense, you think about it, all the material blessing of the land is already yours to enjoy, right?

The milk and the honey, you get to make yogurt out of it, or whatever. It's all there, right? You don't have to be an Israelites to enjoy that.

[17 : 46] So why go through the whole painful process of circumcision, if you're a male, unless there was something more? Well, the answer is that there is something more, because only God's people have a relationship with God as his covenant people.

Only they are heirs to the promises of Abraham, which is more than just the land. These are the true blessings from being free from Egypt, not just the fact of being in the land and being able to eat and enjoy what's in the land.

But once they choose circumcision, they become like one born in the land. they're treated as sons of Abraham, even though they're not direct descendants. It's a bit like me, I'm an Australian by naturalization, I wasn't born here.

But once I became an Australian, I have all the rights and privileges that any of you who were born in the land have as well. I get to vote, I get to serve in the army, I get to do all that.

I'm too old for the army, but anyway. In fact, if you look back at verse 38, the surprising thing is that on the night that they left, there were 600 men on foot, women, children, and then many others went up with them as well.

[19 : 02] Presumably, some of them were Egyptians. And so, what they did, probably, is when they got into the land, they would have been circumcised so that they could then join in and participate and be part of God's people.

But the point of these regulations is this, God's freedom and redemption are really only for his people, those who are circumcised. Now, the thing is that for us, we too can belong to God's covenant people, and thankfully, the way we do that is not by circumcision, but through faith in Jesus.

So, in Colossians chapter 2 and verse 11, Paul says this, on the slide, in him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh were put off when you were circumcised by Christ.

So, now believing in Jesus is the means by which we are circumcised and part of God's people. But friends, let me say this, you may enjoy the fellowship of the church, be part of all its activities, come to Bible studies, join in the singing, but unless you are in Christ's true faith, you are actually like the foreigner in Israel who isn't circumcised.

You don't really get to enjoy the true blessing of God's covenant. But for the rest of us, when we have these great blessings, what we need to realise is that with them there comes some corresponding obligations, which is what we now see in chapter 13.

[20 : 35] And so I'm just going to ask Helen to come back up and she'll read that section for us. 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.

Eat nothing containing yeast. Today, in the month of Aviv, you are leaving. When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites, and Jebusites, the land he swore to your ancestors to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you are to observe this ceremony in this month.

For seven days, eat bread made without yeast, and on the seventh day, hold a festival to the Lord. Eat unleavened bread during those seven days.

Nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders. On that day, tell your son, I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.

This observance will be for you like a sign on your forehead that this law of the Lord is to be on your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand.

[22 : 00] You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time, year after year. 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 ancestors, 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. Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck.

Redeem every firstborn among your sons. In days to come, when your son asks you, what does this mean, say to him, with a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt. This is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb, and redeem each of my firstborn sons.

And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead, that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand. Thank you, Helen.

[23 : 14] So we're on to the third bullet point of point two. Now here God tells Moses to consecrate to him every firstborn male. Consecration is the act of setting something or someone apart, and in this case to signify that it belongs to the Lord.

God is like when some of you were young and there was a whole box of cuddly toys in the playroom, and you go and you pick one to set it apart, to be the one you take to bed each night, the one you take on holidays, the special one.

You've consecrated your special teddy to belong just to you. Now what is described here is essentially the Passover again, although it could be that when after an animal or child is born, there's also an act of consecration then, but in the case of the Passover, God's people are now not only to remember the Lord's redemption, so it's not just a remembrance act, they're not only to participate in the redemption by eating of the lamb or the Passover, but here it is also an act of consecration of the firstborn because it was the firstborn male who was spared on that night, not just sons, but animals as well.

Now by right, when something or someone is consecrated, they're set apart and given to the Lord for his service. But if you look at verse 13, what then happens is that these firstborns are then redeemed or bought back by the sacrifice of the Passover lamb.

That is, as the lamb is being sacrificed, what is being consecrated is redeemed or bought back. Later in Numbers chapter 3 verse 11 to 13, God actually chooses the Levites to take the place of the firstborn.

[25 : 08] So again on the slide, I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman. The Levites are mine for all the firstborn are mine.

When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set apart for myself every firstborn in Israel, whether human or animal. They are to be mine. I am the Lord.

So the fact that they are spared means that now they belong to the Lord. But the Levites are then taken so that they, rather than the firstborn males, end up serving in the temple.

people. But the thing is, the consecration of the firstborn then, what it points to though, is not just that God had spared them at the first Passover, the other thing that it points to is the truth that Israel herself was God's firstborn.

And that we get from, do you remember that warning that Moses gave to Pharaoh in Exodus chapter 3, which I've got in the slide again, where he called Israel, his firstborn son.

[26 : 18] And he said that because Pharaoh refused to let them go, God will kill his firstborn instead. Well, by setting apart the firstborn male, it was a sign that Israel too was being set apart for God as his firstborn.

That they, as the firstborn, belong to God among all the peoples on earth. That they are precious to God as to his kingdom, inheritors of his promises.

And so God is saying, I did not just redeem the firstborn, I redeem all of Israel. That firstborn is just a sign that you too were being redeemed. And likewise, setting them apart is an indication that he is setting apart all of Israel to serve him.

Now, as Christians, there is one further sign for us through this act of consecration. And that act is to point us to Jesus, who is God's first and ultimate firstborn.

And that was in our second New Testament reading tonight, the second reading in Colossians. If you look on the slide again, which I've got that passage back up, twice in that passage, in verse 15 and 18, Jesus is designated as the firstborn.

[27 : 38] Can you see? First over creation and then from among the dead. Now, he's not literally the firstborn because he's eternal, he was never born as it were, although humanly he was, but he's the firstborn in the sense of being the true heir, God's most precious son.

Now, for him, he didn't need to be redeemed because he was perfect, but he was chosen and set apart, like a firstborn is, to serve God's great plan of salvation.

And the amazing thing is that for us as Christians, when we are redeemed by his blood, we too get to share in that firstborn status.

So the writer of Hebrews in chapter 12 and verse 23 calls us the church or the gathering of the firstborn. In that passage, whereas Israel was redeemed and gathered at Mount Sinai, here, Christians are redeemed from sin, and we gather at Mount Zion, God's heavenly city, as the gathering, as the church of the firstborn.

And we gather in order that then God calls us to serve him, just as the Levites did, just as the firstborns were consecrated to do. Remember how I started with the whole discussion about how humans thirst for freedom?

[29 : 06] freedom? Well, we've sort of come back full circle, haven't we? Because what the Bible tells us is that God gives us freedom in order for us to serve him.

That is, we're not free to just go our independent way apart from him. No, we are free to enter into a relationship with him as our master and our lord.

And that's not a contradiction because at the end of the day, we all end up serving something or someone in life. The only difference is whether we live under the bondage of sin and evil and be truly enslaved or we live under the rule of God, serve him wholeheartedly and willingly and be truly free because that's what God created us to do.

So are you tired of being enslaved to your own selfish desires, to be mastered by your uncontrollable temple, to be controlled by your addictions and vices?

That's not real freedom, is it? You think you can do what you want, but actually, there's no joy or freedom in any of these things. Or do we put our trust in Jesus, allow him to be our substitute, and be freed from sin and death, so that we can then consecrate ourselves, set ourselves apart, to serve God wholeheartedly?

[30 : 31] I know that for a lot of us, we go through life asking, you know, what should I be doing with my life? You know, what is it that God wants me to do? The answer actually is quite simple.

It's hard, but it's very simple. And the answer is, we are given, we are being given to give our lives to serve God. God. We may not know all the minor details of, you know, if I do this, where would this lead, and how would this all end?

We might not even know how long we have in this life. But what God is asking us to do is every time, at every stage of our lives, every day of the week, every week of the year, as we are being called to make choices in life, we ask the question,