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Exodus 12-13

God's Exodus People:
Can You Remember?

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Do you have a good memory? If someone tells you something really important, and says, "you have to remember this" do you? Or do you have to write down? There's a saying, "The shortest pencil is longer than the longest memory." If you're the kind of person who has to write stuff down, and then is also prone to misplacing small slips of paper, then there's nothing I can do for you.

I want to test our memories today. I want to say a phrase, and see if you can remember it by the end of the sermon. I'm going to tell you the phrase. Are you ready? The phrase is... "goat on a tree." There are lots of ways to remember this phrase, aren't there? You could write it down. You could whisper it to a friend. How about we do that right now. Why don't you turn to your neighbor and say, "goat on a tree."

I've also brought a picture to help you remember. Here are some tree goats of Morocco famous for climbing trees. They love tree nuts and there isn't much grass, so they climb trees. If you're really serious, this summer you can go to Honey Pot Hill Orchard in Stow MA and see your very own "goat on a tree."

It's easy to forget things, isn't it? Apparently, it's a myth that fish have a three-second memory. The whole movie, *Finding Dory*, is just one big lie. Researchers have proven that fish can remember things for up to five months. So if you can't remember "goat on a tree", a goldfish has a better memory than you...

We're not the only one who struggles to remember things. In Exodus chapter 12, Moses is about to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt, but God wants them to remember a really important truth. He's so serious about this truth he creates a special Holiday to help them remember.

What we do on Holidays? We remember. On **July 4th**, we remember our freedoms. On **Labor Day** we remember how hard work benefits everyone. On **Halloween**, we remember candy. On **Christmas**, we remember the birth of Jesus, and on **Easter** we remember his resurrection. Last week some of us even celebrated the **Chinese New Year**, which remembers the last Chinese year and looks forward to the next.

The Holiday God gives the Israelites is **Passover**. This day is meant to remind the Israelites of this truth...

Remember your Passover substitute, the lamb.

The Israelites celebrate this Holiday with a meal like we do **Thanksgiving**. Today this meal is called a Sedar, and Jewish people still eat a lamb shank, bitter herbs, and other foods that remind them of their ancestors flight from Egypt. The meaning of **Passover** is actually in its name.

Exodus 12:26-27a And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.' "... (NIV®)

The Passover reminds us of God "passing-over" the Israelites when he judged the Egyptians. As we study Exodus chapters 12-13, we see **Three Remembrances** that help us understand this one big truth.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

Remembrance #1. The Passover lamb is a personal substitute.

Last week I preached through the plagues of Egypt. Tonight I'm finishing with the last one, **the death of the firstborn**. God is about to send the worst plague on Egypt, he's going to kill every firstborn son because Pharaoh won't let the Israelites go.

Exodus 11:5 Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. (NIV®)

God is going to kill the firstborns of Egypt. In ancient cultures, the firstborn son had certain privileges called a **birthright**. He got a double portion of the inheritance (Deut 21:17). He was a sign of his father's strength (Gen 49:3) and authority (2 Chr 21:3). and he was especially blessed (Gen 49:8-12). In Egypt, the firstborn of Pharaoh would one-day rule in his father's place, and was even treated like a god.

But God is going to pass-over the firstborn sons of Israel. **How?** He is going to provide each firstborn with a **substitute**. *A substitute is someone or something takes the place of another.* What is the substitute? A lamb.

Moses tells the Israelites to take a year-old male lamb and sacrifice it. This lamb could be a sheep or a goat (probably not a goat on a tree) and it can't have any defects—so spotless, no broken bones or scars (v. 5). As twilight comes, they take the lambs and kill them. Then they use hyssop, a plant with a hairy texture on its leaves, and dip it in the blood and wipe it on the doorframe of the house, the top and sides. When God comes to kill the firstborn (v. 23), he accepts the blood of this sacrifice and “passes-over” their firstborn.

This whole idea of a personal substitutionary lamb isn't foreign to the Israelites. They would have heard the story of God telling their great forefather Abraham to climb up Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son Isaac. God stopped Abraham, but at the last possible moment. He spares Isaac by giving Abraham a ram caught in the thicket. He sacrifices that lamb as a “burnt offering” instead of Isaac (Gen 22:13). Just like God tested Abraham, now they think, God is testing us, he wants us to believe and obey as well.

Let's think about our culture for a moment. The firstborn is the oldest child, a boy or girl. Maybe you think of someone who has more responsibility in your home. Most of all, you think of a name, right? The Israelites, wouldn't have thought of the names of firstborn sons too, “I don't want Reuben to die... or Aaron... or Zebedee... or...” If you were in Egypt, whose name would you say? “I don't want Timothy to die... or Preston... or Micah, or Max, or Sawyer, or Jonathan or William...” Do you feel how personal this lamb's sacrifice is? It's life and death. #1 *The Passover lamb is a personal substitute.*

Remembrance #2. The Passover lamb provides undeserved substitution.

If God had not provided a Passover lamb for each Israelite household, and he had sent that final plague, each Israelite firstborn would have died. This means that the firstborn of Israel, although they were spared by God, are just as deserving of death as the firstborn sons of Egypt. This is because they too are guilty of sin.

Psalms 51:5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (NIV®)

If God is perfectly good, sin is anytime we're not perfectly good. Sin isn't just the bad decisions we sometimes make, it's actually a posture of the heart. Rebellion. Disobedience. Mistrust. We're all born in sin. God is so pure he can't let sin go unpunished, because to do so would be unjust. So if the children of Israel and Egypt are born in sin, they are all guilty, and they all deserve's death.

The firstborns of Israel aren't spared because they deserve it. They're given a lamb in their place as a gift. That's grace, an undeserved gift. They live because someone else pays for their sins in their place, a substitute lamb. The theological word for this is **substitutionary atonement**. God provides a substitution to atone for (to pay for, to make up for) the sins of the firstborns.

Do you know we're also guilty? We're not innocent and so we need a substitute (Rom 3:23, 6:23). If you were standing at the gates of heaven and God said, "Why should I let you in?" What would you say? Would you say, "Because I'm a good person?" That answer won't fly. God will not "pass over" you. The best of humans are still guilty because of sin. We can't earn our way to heaven. We need a substitute to pay for our sins so we can go in. #2. *The Passover lamb provides undeserved substitution.*

Remembrance #3. The Passover lamb's substitution isn't enough.

Not only does the lamb save the firstborn in each home, God claims every firstborn son in Israel as his own going forward. This is because the sin problem still remains. He tells Moses to consecrate every firstborn male from the womb, whether human or child (Ex 13:1). So they continue to sacrifice the firstborn sheep, goats, and cattle and they "redeem" the firstborn male children by sacrificing lambs (Num 3:41).

When the Israelites reach the promised land, God changes this. He sets aside the tribe of Levi to act as the substitutes for the firstborns for all Israel.

Numbers 8:17-18 Every firstborn male in Israel, whether human or animal, is mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set them apart for myself. And I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn sons in Israel. (NIV®)

The tribe of Levi is dedicated to God. They aren't given land, but they are given cities, and they're called to serve as priests. They lead the people in worship, offer sacrifices, and serve as God's special servants. What this tells us is two things: 1) People still continue to sin and need a substitute; and 2) the life of a goat or sheep does not work. #3. *The Passover lamb's substitution isn't enough.*

The life of a sheep or goat does not equate to the life of a child. You need to substitute one person for another person. But you can't sacrifice a human being to save another human being. Even when the Levites are consecrated, they're still not good enough. They're born in sin just like everyone else. The Israelites need a better lamb, a better substitute, so that they no longer have to fear God's judgment.

Moses wanted the people to "Remember your Passover substitute, the lamb" because this lamb points to another better lamb who will come one day. Many years later a prophet named Isaiah says another lamb is going to come who will be a good enough sacrifice for the people's sins.

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

When we think of Passover, I don't want us to remember just any lamb, but how it points to the final lamb.

Remember your Passover substitute, the lamb Jesus.

Our Passover lamb, unlike the lambs back in Egypt, has a name. In the New Testament, when John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, saw him coming down to the Jordan river to get baptized, what does he call him?

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (NIV®)

Jesus isn't just going to take away the sin of one boy or one girl, he's going to take away the sin of a whole world of people, anyone who is willing to confess their sins and put their faith in him.

Do any of you recall that phrase I wanted you to remember at the beginning of the sermon? It's kind of a silly phrase, “goat on a tree.” I told you that phrase to help you remember another, similar phrase, “lamb on a tree.” Passover is also a reminder for Christians today to not just remember the Passover lambs that died in Egypt, but another lamb that died 2,000 years ago outside of Jerusalem on a tree. When you think of “goat on a tree” remember the “lamb on a tree, Jesus Christ.”

Remember the blood on the **doorframe** of the houses, on the top and sides? Goat on a tree. That looks forward to the wooden frame of the **cross**, where Jesus would shed his **blood**. Lamb on a tree.

If you were to die today, and God were to ask you, “Why should I let you into heaven?” The right answer is to simply point to the cross. Point to Jesus and say, “He paid for my sins, he gave his body and his blood for me. He's my king, my savior, my substitute. He takes the place I deserve on the tree and gives me his place in heaven with you, God. Through Jesus, I'm perfect and can dwell forever in your presence.” The great news is Jesus shares eternity with us, he rose from the grave, and is already home.

Jesus has paid it all. He has redeemed us, he has purchased us. His blood atones for our sins.

1 Peter 1:18-19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (NIV®)

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, celebrates the sacrifice of the lamb. The prophet John get's a vision of the end of time, and there's a big celebration. “...four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb” (Rev 5:8b) and this is what they say,

Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

God delivered a “mixed multitude” (Ex 12:38) from Egypt and one day he will deliver people from tribe and nation on earth through Jesus. *Remember Your Passover substitute, the lamb Jesus.*

In London, there's a park called **Postman's Park** which has a memorial. It's not a memorial to postmen, servicemen, or first-responders. It's a memorial to everyday heroes who died while trying to save the life of another. The monument has sixty-two different stories of men, women, and children who made the ultimate sacrifice. The youngest story is of an eight year old boy, and the oldest is of a sixty-one year old man.

Imagine with me for a moment that you're in that park, that garden, and you see another memorial. It tells the story of a Jewish carpenter who saved the life of a friend, but was murdered by corrupt politicians and the religious elite as he did so. And then you look at the name of the friend, and you get a lump in your throat, because you discover your name. Jesus died to save “Jonathan, Monique, Ran, Bruce, Sharon...” Jesus died to save you! Me! Anyone who puts their faith in him.

Today, we're actually visiting the memorial. Today we're visiting the Lord's Supper, which is a memorial. On the night before he was betrayed, Jesus told his disciples to do it in memory of him. This evening, I invite you to come and sit in the park, to quiet yourself, and to remember your savior lamb who substituted himself to save us. While the kids come back in, I want to make one final point...

Jesus substituted himself for us so that we can live changed lives.

When Moses enacted the Passover celebration, he also started another Holiday, the **Festival of Unleavened Bread**, which overlaps with Passover. In this festival, the Israelites are not supposed to not eat any leaven, or yeast, in their bread. This isn't just because they need to pack their food, but because leaven symbolizes sin. What does yeast do? It makes bread rise, it causes it to swell, puff up, and it can ruin a good loaf.

The New Testament says as Christians we are to fight the leaven in our lives (1 Cor 5:6-8). We're to turn away from the sin. See, first Jesus becomes our substitute, and because he's already changed us on the inside, we're to live changed lives on the outside. We're not to let sin work its way into our relationships and homes. This isn't easy. We're not perfect, but can be repentant. When we sin, we come to the lamb, and say, "I'm sorry." I blew it. Forgive me. Help me live for you." That's not easy, but it's worth it.

Here's a hint to doing that... *If you want to fight sin, get to know the lamb.* The Israelites were told to take care of the lamb for four days before sacrificing it. That seems kind of cruel, doesn't it. You can imagine the kids playing with the lamb, feeding it, petting, giving it a name, Snow. And then on the night of the Passover dad takes the lamb out back and kills it. The sacrifice is supposed to sting! Sin hurt our savior Jesus. My sins hurt him on the cross. If I don't know him, it won't bother me. But if I get to know him, I'll realize just how much Jesus had to go through for my sins, and it will make them that much less tempting.

If you're not ready to say you're sorry to Jesus, if you're not ready to turn away from your sin, that's your choice, but part of the **consequences** of that choice is not taking communion. 1st Corinthians says to "examine ourselves" before we take the Supper, because if we don't we can bring judgment upon ourselves. So if that's you, please hold off. You don't have to be perfect, but you do have to be repentant.

Remember your Passover substitute, the lamb Jesus.

On the night of Passover, Jesus enacted a new meal, the fulfillment of the Passover, the **Lord's Supper**. He picked up unleavened bread, no yeast, flat bread, broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (1 Cor 11:24) Jesus is saying, "I'm the sinless unleavened bread. And I'm about to break my sinless body for you."

After Jesus broke the bread he picked up a cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20) The life is in the blood (Lev 17:14). Jesus not only takes away your sins, he gives us his life. Come to the table, come to the park, and remember what Jesus has done.

Although we didn't read it tonight, in Exodus chapter 12 Moses bars anyone who is **uncircumcised** from eating the Passover meal. This was a special meal for the Israelites, the people of God. But foreigners were allowed to partake of it if all the males in the family were **circumcised** (Ex 12:43-49).

The Lord's Supper is also for God's special people today. You're one of God's special people if you have confessed your sins and put your faith in the lamb, Jesus. What's required today is not a physical circumcision of the body, but a spiritual **circumcision of the heart**. If you can say, Jesus has changed my

heart, he's made me new, then you can partake of the Lord's Supper. You don't have to be a member of this church, but simply a member of God's family through Jesus.

As I invite the servers up, I want you to remember the lamb on the tree. *Remember your Passover substitute, the lamb Jesus.*

“Benediction means blessing.”

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV®)