

Salvation from Egypt

Exodus 12.1-14

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These weeks we are going through a series of sermons about Moses and how he was used by God to save the people of Israel. This is definitely stuff for great movies.

In the story today we see that the Israelites had to stay in their homes with their families. What a great example of social distancing. This has been the theme for all of us worldwide in the past half year. But it would be rather shallow to see such applications in this story.

Let us focus on Israel, long ago, and see what we can learn from them.

1. Punishment for the enemies and for their gods

What did Israel need salvation from? First, clearly, from the Egyptians who oppressed them. Egypt abused the Israelites, it treated them as slaves, and it did not want to let them worship God in the desert.

So Israel was in need of salvation from a social and political environment that was not particularly friendly. The oppression was harsh. As today, many people live under oppressive regimes and in oppressive economic systems.

But the economic and political oppression was not the only thing Israel had to be saved from. It also needed the help of God against those who scorned their idea of worshipping God in the desert.

‘Just worship as we do, in our culture, in our society.’ is what Pharaoh said. ‘Why are you so exclusive? Why think that your god is so special! We have 2000 gods, your god is number 2001. Fine. You must be more inclusive, be one of us!’

State, society and religion were woven together in a manner that was oppressive to anyone who did not wholeheartedly embrace all three – state, culture, and the civic religion.

I lived in the Egyptian neighbourhood called Heliopolis for a while - there the Egyptians worshiped Ra, the sun god, and many other gods with him.

The creation story in the Bible beautifully rejects these Egyptian gods. God spoke his word, and in a fraction of a moment the sun was created. Ra was nothing.



But on the other hand, Ra and those gods were powerful. They served to justify the exploitation of the Israelites.

Just as many people today use religion for exploiting people. Sadly, Christianity was for a time a tool in the hands of white traders to sell black slaves. Just as today, Islam is often used as a tool to oppress non-muslim minorities.

One important aspect of the salvation of God, is that he comes to avenge. Those who, with their oppressive gods, oppress the people of God, they will not have the last word.

In the book of Revelation we see Christian martyrs in heaven, calling to God: “How long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who live on earth...”



The cry to God for justice against oppressive regimes and their gods is totally biblical.

I remember a student I once had in Egypt - a beautiful young woman. She walked with crutches, as she was crippled. And she had burn wounds on her arm. And she was deaf in one ear.

The wounds in her heart were much worse. She was in a church in Alexandria that was bombed. She was badly wounded, and worse, her mother was killed. And her sister. And her aunt.

The salvation of God is that he comes to comfort those who have been abused, and to punish those who do evil.

And He will come to make an end to all mental constructions, religions, states, philosophies that are bad for people.

He will come for you, if you suffer from oppression. Maybe of things that happened to you in your past. Or even things going on now. Even negative thoughts that have been planted in your mind by others.

Those thoughts, some can be demonic - especially thoughts that press you down. Thoughts of not being worthy for God. Not being a good enough person. God wants to liberate you from those ideas.

Many of those ideas, where do they come from? From God? Most certainly not.

So from your upbringing, from the culture we live in, from our modern Egypt. We are strangers in a strange land, but it is so easy to adopt many of the ideas of Egypt as if they are ok.

2. Salvation of Israel

Israel also had to be saved from the gods of Egypt. In Exodus 12.12 we read that God was preparing to pass through the land to strike the oppressive Egyptians, and He said, 'and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements. I am the Lord.'

In Egypt, the gods had to be kept happy by sacrificing to them. Blood sacrifice was regarded as the most supreme form of serving the gods. It kept them happy.



Initially, animals were the only creatures that were sacrificed. Bulls, for instance were killed, crocodiles were also commonly slaughtered, to please the gods with their blood.

Then with the course of time, Egyptians began to sacrifice humans. Historians believe that most of the victims were criminals, rebels or prisoners of war.

Many Israelites had adopted this view of religion. They had to be saved from the idea that God always wants something from us.

That he always wants our handouts.

That God is in need of what we can give him.

That he is happy to see us sweat.

That he is never satisfied.

That He always wants more from you.

Is that your view of God?

God wanted to save Israel - and us - from this idolatry. God want to save us from that false god who lives in the corners of our hearts and minds. Because He loves us, and he wants our love. Not our blood. "Love the Lord your God," not: bleed for him.

Israel wanted to be freed from its oppressors, but they in actual fact also needed to be liberated from themselves. And that was a process of a lifetime. God needed 40 years of Israel in the desert, to work on this.

The story we read was the beginning of this process for Israel. God came to liberate them from their enemies, but also to deal with their hearts, so full of those Egyptian gods and ideas.

And Israel was told precisely what to do in order to be safe, to be on the side of God on the first night of liberation. Every family had to take a perfect sheep, kill it, and collect its blood.

An animal had to die in order to save the people - a real sacrifice. The concept of sacrifice for salvation was central. You know of course how this idea is worked out in Israel's temple service, by the slaughtering of so many animals.

But there is something strange going on in the story that I always overlooked.

The animal is killed, the blood is collected, and in Egypt, it would then be presented to a god, it would be put in a bowl under his statue, or sprinkled over that statue.

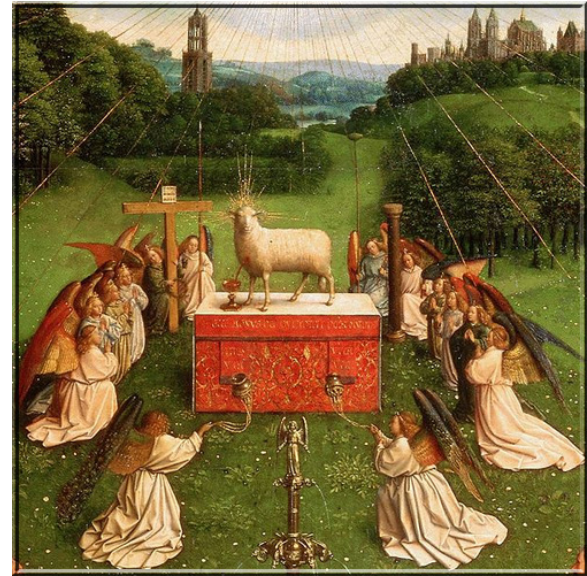
But Israel has to apply the blood to the doorposts. The blood was not given to God, it was given to the people. To their homes, to their families.

The blood on the doorposts was not to help God, to know where his people were living. He is not that thick. He knows all that. The real lesson, the bloody information, was for the Israelites.

It was a reversal of the view of God, and the gods that was prevalent then - and also today. We do not sacrifice our blood to Him. He actually bleeds for us. He does not need our help. He helps us.

You do not need to help a statue of God by feeding it blood. God comes to you - to you, image of God - to support, and help and encourage you.

Our Lord Jesus, on the night before he was delivered, celebrated exactly this feast with his disciples; He made clear that He was making himself the perfect sacrificial Lamb for the world.



His death for us, was the starting point for God's great salvation project. He has freed us from sin, the fear of death, from oppression by forces of evil. He has saved us from the wicked gods who tell us: give me give me give me more....

He took us out of Egypt, into a new life. And his work in our life lasts a lifetime. He has much work to do in us, to set us free from the mindset and the gods of the culture we live in.

3. Salvation: Matter of the whole community

Israel learns in this process of its liberation from Egypt, how highly God values humans. He created them as images of himself. He idolises humans.

That sounds strange, does it not? But that is what it means that God made us into his own image. His idol. His icon. His statue.

In six days he created our beautiful world as a temple - and the last thing he did was to bring Adam and Eve into the garden of Eden, the holy of holies of the temple of this world.

Just as in Egypt, or Babylon, after a temple was built, the last thing to be done was to bring the idol into the center of the temple.

That idol would be fed, and he would get his drinks. As Adam and Eve received food from God. That is religion upside down. A God who serves us.

That is what God made clear to Israel when he liberated them. I do not need your food. I will feed you.

So Israel, on that night of liberation, had to eat the lambs they sacrificed. God took care of them. They had to celebrate this as families, and with anyone who could not afford a lamb.

God treats every person with great love and care. And we must love God in return, and we must love the images of God: our neighbours.

That love for God and for others is the strongest cement of our community. To love the other, always leads to rapprochement, communion, fellowship.

God sees himself in every human individual, however deep some people have fallen. If we have the mindset of God - if we view people through his metaphorical eyes, we see God in other people. We care for them. We love them.

That is why we, as a congregation, meet together. To believe together, to eat together, to live together under the blessing of God. And this not only once a week for an hour or so.

Our Lord Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He commands us to let go of the gods, the ideas, the mind, the lifestyle of the world we live in, and to live in accordance with the will of his Father.

And for those who desire to do so, he does forgive our lack of perfection. He forgives us when we allow hatred, anger, a lack of kindness, a lack of love to dictate our behaviour and our mind.

This is the salvation he offers. The promise that one day, he will make all things good; evil will be punished and goodness rewarded.

But salvation is also that he draws us out of a mindset and a lifestyle that is not wholesome. And that he forgives us our sins and weaknesses.

Conclusion

Like Israel in the past, at Holy Communion we reject the lifestyle of the Egyptians, and the gods of this world, to worship our Lord God alone.

You know what the Israelites did when Moses explained to them how God was going to save them? Exodus 12.27 says: 'The people bowed down and worshipped...'. Not to please God in the hope he would save them. But because He gave them salvation first.

We also kneel worshipfully for the heavenly Father as revealed in Jesus Christ.

We eat the Lamb given by God to us, for our salvation; In return, our sacrifice of thanks to Him is love, for Him, and all the images of God we meet.

+ Amen