

"The Last Passover"
Exodus 11-12
May 8, 2005
Dr. Jerry Nelson

"Alone In The Universe" 2001?

David Usher

Jamie's on the bathroom floor she don't know why
She's shaking underneath the sink can't feel a thing
She'd love to live a life she's afraid of failure
With all the voices in her head
Now what was that I thought I hear you scream

I think we're alone here you and I
I think we're alone left wondering why
I think we're alone here you and I
I think we're alone in the universe tonight

Alex on the last train home from god knows where
A million miles away from where he thought he'd be
He's got his suit his tie his drink his MTV
He's trading all his life away
You can't escape, we're all infected now

I think we're alone here you and I
I think we're alone left wondering why
I think we're alone here you and I
I think we're alone in the universe tonight

Probably all of us know something of what it means to feel alone.

I obviously don't mean just being away from others
momentarily.

I do mean to experience separateness, no connection, no
one or place where you belong.

Have you ever felt that?

It is possible that there is no greater emotional pain or fear than
that.

A few nights ago I watched some 60-year-old film footage of the
emancipation of the survivors of the Nazi concentration camps.

I saw children who had been **born** in those camps now without
any family anywhere, with no idea of even where their families
had lived, and no one or no place where they belonged.

The need to belong is a powerful need.

We were created as relational creatures – and **superficial** relationships only intensify the feelings of loneliness.

Where do you belong?

And is that belonging substantial or only superficial?

A superficial relationship is belonging to the same health club, or going to the same school, or working at the same company.

A superficial relationship is based on passing events or interests - we went through some crisis together or we both like to fish.

A less superficial relationship is built on what doesn't pass away so quickly – marriage, family, ethnicity, and nationality.

But as you think about even those relationships you realize that even they aren't as substantial as they at first appear.

Family members move, disagreements become estrangements, and eventually but certainly the deaths of others leave us alone.

Is there anything or anyone to which or to whom we belong that is stronger, more enduring, more substantial, or more secure than the passing relationships of life?

Is there any relationship that can endure not only time but also eternity?

Can I belong not just superficially but substantially, with enduring reality, truly, without end?

Or am I, after all, really “alone in the universe?”

I know there are Christians who **feel** they don't belong.

While that is sad, it is not tragic.

While they may feel lonely they are not in fact alone and so they need to be shown again the reality of the enduring, substantial relationships they do have.

Tragic is the non-Christian who doesn't feel lonely but truly **is** alone – whose relationships are only superficial and temporal.

Like the homeowner who confidently thinks he can ward off an intruder, not realizing his gun is empty, so also is the man or

woman who wards off loneliness with superficial relationships, when in the end those relationships will fail.

What relationships will not fail?

What relationships can I count on no matter what happens, even when death happens?

If ever there were people who thought they didn't belong and who thought they had been forgotten it would be the Jewish people in Egypt.

For 400 years they lived in increasingly intolerable slavery. They had become nothing, the refuse of the earth's people.

What is more disposable than a 10th generation slave?

Yes, they had been promised that a day would come when they would be free, but how difficult must it have been to keep hope alive when generation after generation was born, suffered as slaves and died with no change?

- Did they have anything in common besides misery and death?
- Did they belong anywhere?

God stepped into that apparent hopelessness and began to bring to pass the long promised deliverance.

At God's direction, Moses demanded of the Pharaoh of Egypt that the people of Israel be freed from slavery to go to their own land.

Most of you know that the Pharaoh refused and so God brought increasingly severe plagues on Egypt to convince the Egyptians and the Israelites of God's presence and power.

But due to the hardness of his heart, Pharaoh insanely resisted God.

That brings us to the event, which we looked at last week and now look at again this week – Passover.

- Most people know of Passover as some kind of Jewish holiday.
- Many people know it is rooted in Jewish history.

- Some even know it is based on the specific event described in Exodus 12.

Passover is connected to the 10th and final plague that God brought on Egypt.

As Moses was being “kicked out” of the Pharaoh’s presence after the 9th plague, Moses turned to him and said,

Exodus 11:4-8 “This is what the LORD says: `About midnight I (the LORD) will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well.’ There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt--worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal.’ (In other words, nothing will happen among the Israelites.) Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, `Go, you and all the people who follow you!’ After that I will leave.” Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh.

God is about to take a hopeless, destined-for-death, despised people and form them into a kingdom, a nation; a people **belonging to him**.

He is going to give them a substantial relationship, one that will last forever.

From now on, what they hold most significantly in common will not be their ancestry, and certainly not their slavery, but what they will hold in common is that they are now **the new people of God**.

In the centuries to come many Jews would get it wrong.

They would think that their relationships were based on being descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But that was only the basis of a superficial relationship.

The substantial relationship was based on the fact that they now belonged to **the God** of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

That’s why 1500 years later the Jewish/Christian Apostle Paul would write, Romans 9:6-7 “Not all who are descended from Israel are

Israel. Nor (just) because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.”

Romans 2:28 “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly... No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly...”

He belongs to God by what God does not by ethnicity or nationality.

And so God is about to create a people for himself a people belonging to him and each other, and **forever** belonging to him and each other.

How can this possibly be relevant to us?

What you are going to see is what God did 3500 years ago that pictured, symbolized, or demonstrated what God did for us in Christ.

In fact even what God did for the Israelites in Egypt, in making them a people who belong to him, is based on what God would do, 1500 years later, not only for them but for us as well.

Do we need and desire to truly belong, to have real relationships, substantial relationships?

The basis of those substantial relationships that endure through time and eternity is shown to us here.

Please stand for the reading of God’s word: Exodus 12:1-12

“The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ² “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³ Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ⁴ If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. ⁵ **The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect**, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶ Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must **slaughter them** at twilight. ⁷ Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. ⁸ That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the

fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. ⁹ Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire--head, legs and inner parts. ¹⁰ Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹ This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover.

^{EX 12:12} "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn--both men and animals--and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. ¹³ **The blood will be a sign for you** on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, **I will pass over you**. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

May God bless the reading of his Word.

Prayer

There are three things I want you to see about God's creation of a people who belong to **him**:

1. The source of that relationship
2. The means of that relationship
3. The emblems of that relationship

First of all – the source of our belonging to God.

One of the things that caught my attention again in my study of this passage this week was that God told the Israelites that he, God, was going to bring death on **every** first-born in the land.

God's judgment was going to pass through the entire land, **even through the neighborhoods of the Israelites**.

The first-born of the Israelites were not automatically exempt from the judgment.

In fact they were equally deserving of judgment.

The Bible says that the person who sins dies. (Ezekiel 18:4, 18)

Both the Old and New Testaments confirm that no one is righteous, no one who seeks for God. (Psalm 14 and Romans 3)

God has absolute justification to judge every person and every family, whether Egyptian or Israelite, because all are equally deserving of God's wrath.

That might have come as something of a shock to the Israelites.

- They might have thought that because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were their ancestors, they deserved to be saved from the plague of death.
- They might have thought that since they had been slaves so long, surely it was right that they be spared; hadn't they suffered enough?

But the implication is clear enough – everyone comes under this judgment.

Most people yet today think God “grades on a curve.”

- That is not true and never has been true.
- God's requirement for a relationship with him is absolute and unbending – God is holy and we must be holy.
- God cannot tolerate sin in his presence and the wages of sin is death.

The only hope for the Israelites and for us is if God does something.

Not only are the Israelites deserving of death but they are helpless to do anything about it.

After 400 years of slavery and 9 plagues that the Pharaoh resisted, it ought to be apparent to the Israelites that on their own they are hopelessly enslaved.

They and we are completely dependent on God.

All they and we can do is cry out for God to save us.

And so throughout this passage it is clear that it is God who is acting:

“I will pass through Egypt...” “I will bring judgment...” “I will pass over...”

God is acting – he is the only source of salvation.

We, too, are bound for judgment and eternal death unless God acts.

We have no excuses that mean anything.

On our own we are helpless and hopeless.

We may have superficial relationships now, but we are headed for an eternity of isolation, of forever alone.

Ignorant and foolish is the man who thinks he will have company in hell.

If we are going to belong to God, if we are going to have substantial relationships that last for time and eternity, God must act.

And that is precisely what God does.

What we see next is the means that God uses to bring people into a belonging relationship with himself and each other.

In the Exodus account of the first Passover, God told every family to take a lamb or if it was a very small family they were to join with another small family.

- That lamb was to be one year old – in the prime of life.
- It was to be without defect.
- They were to keep the lamb for three days to make certain it was without defect.
- Then they were to slaughter it.
- They were to put some of the blood of the lamb on the doorframe of their house and then they were to eat the meat.

I can imagine some of the Israelites saying to themselves, “How can smearing some blood over the door keep a plague of death from touching us?” “This is ridiculous!”

But God had determined that it takes blood to redeem blood – a life to redeem a life.

Hebrews 9:22 “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

Because the holiness of God demands holiness and the justice of God demands a life for a life, there can be no forgiveness and no relationship with God without the shedding of blood.

To think that is extreme is to show how little we understand of holiness and justice – God cannot violate his own character.

But this all begs the question, **“How can the blood of an animal atone or make up for the sins of people?”**

The answer is, it doesn't!

God put a system of animal sacrifice in place that would continue until he provided the perfect Lamb, his own Son, at just the right time to

permanently take away the sins of his people and give them a real and lasting relationship with him and each other.

Referring to the Passover sacrifices and all the other blood sacrifices of the Old Testament, the author of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 10:8-14: First (Jesus) said, "Sacrifices and offerings...you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made).⁹ Then (Jesus) said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." (Jesus) sets aside the first to establish the second... Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.¹² But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.... By one sacrifice (Jesus) has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."

In another place the Apostle Paul makes clear that the sins of all of God's people of all generations are atoned for in the same way – through the death of Lamb of God – Jesus.

Romans 3:25-26 "God presented (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement... (God) did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

The blood of those lambs smeared over the doors, couldn't atone for the sins of God's people.

But they pointed forward to a "Lamb" whose blood would and did!

We Christians aren't being macabre when we speak so much of blood – we are talking about the very means of our relationship with God – the blood of the eternal Son of God, Jesus.

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 forefathers,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Now I want us to again put ourselves in the place of those Israelites that night.

We have been told to take a lamb and kill it and put blood over the door of our home.

What would you do?

Would you be tempted to sit it out and see what happens?

If you did **not** put blood over the door, what did God say would happen?

- You could claim all night that you were descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- You could take out and look at the family genealogical record showing that you were part of the tribe of Judah or the tribe of Levi , or part of the First Baptist Church or St Mary's Catholic church, but unless you put that blood over the door of your house, your firstborn would die that night.

If you **did** put blood over the door and the plague of death passed over not killing your first-born what would you say?

Would you say that you saved your first-born?

Would you claim that your effort of putting blood over the door is what kept your first-born from dying?

Of course not!

You understand that it was the blood of the sacrifice that atoned for the sin of your family.

Your putting the blood over the door was simply your expression of faith in God - that God would save you by the grace of substituting a lamb for you.

You were saved by Grace through faith.

But your faith was faith in action; it was faith that acted.

We can believe the Jesus is God and we can even know that Jesus died for sins but unless we take the faith/action step of placing our trust in him, eternal dying is our future.

Romans 10:9-10 "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you

believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

Or as the Apostle Peter said it in Acts 2:21 “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Have **you**?

It’s not enough to just sit in your house and **think** about putting blood over the door or even to think that if you did it would save your first-born’s life.

Faith acts – it calls on the name of the Lord. It believes in the heart and confesses with the mouth.

The Bible says that baptism is certainly one of the first acts of faith.

- I am **not** saying we must be baptized to be saved.
- I **am** saying that if one is truly trusting in Jesus, he or she will be baptized because baptism is prescribed by the one in whom we now say we trust.

The baptism doesn’t save us anymore than putting the blood over the door saved the Israelites – It is God who saves us, the blood over the door and baptism are expressions of faith in God.

The means of our “belonging” relationship with God is by grace through faith.

Ephesians 2:12 “Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

“Separate,” “excluded,” “foreigners,” “without hope,” and “without God.”

Could anything more strongly or accurately define what it means to belong nowhere, to be truly alone in the universe – to maybe have superficial relationships but no substantial relationship that will last for time and eternity?

But look at the next verse: Ephesians 2:13 “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

What does he mean we have been “brought near?”

It means we have become a new people, a people who belong to God and to each other.

1 Peter 2:9-10 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

From the broader perspective that includes both now and eternity, I have more in common with an Urdu-speaking, sheep-herding, Pakistani-Christian than I do with my northern-European, middle-class, Bronco-loving neighbor next door.

That Pakistani and I are brothers!

We were born into different families, ethnicities; we have different histories and nationalities.

But we have **re-born** into the same eternal family of God.

We now have the same Father, we are of the same race, the same citizenship, and we have a common history looking back on the same people as our forefathers and the same events as our family heritage.

That brings me to my last point – the emblems of our new “belonging” relationship with God.

The author Moses weaves the instructions about future Passover celebrations into the story of the first Passover.

God wanted the annual celebration to be inextricably connected to the actual historical event.

God wanted his people to remember what he had done for them.

He wanted them to remember that **he** had saved them and that he had saved them not by their efforts or merit, but by a very real, life for life, sacrifice made for them.

But we now know that first Passover looked forward to the last Passover.

As we saw earlier in Hebrews 10:11-12 “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”

And so when the time came for the ultimate Passover Lamb, Jesus, to shed his own blood for the sins of his people, he called his disciples together and **initiated a new ritual.**

From the fuller revelation we are given in the New Testament, we can see that the annual Passover ritual looked forward to the Cross of Jesus.

And just before the cross, Jesus took that Passover ritual and changed it to the Lord’s Supper.

Just as the Passover ritual, before the Cross, was meant to connect the people of God to the Exodus event, so the Lord’s Supper, after the Cross, is meant to connect the people of God to the Cross event.

The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

And just as the first Passover was to be observed regularly, so the last Passover is to be observed, “Until he comes.”

Just as the first and subsequent Passover meals were the emblems of God’s redeeming grace that would come, so the Lord’s Supper is the emblem of that completed redeeming grace brought about through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Every Sunday, we have the table before us and twice each month we actually participate in the Lord’s Supper, all to constantly remind us of

the basis of our real, substantial, enduring, “belonging” relationship with God and his people.

This relationship with God and his people is the one that counts because we belong to him and each other forever.

Jesus said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age...

“I will never leave you or forsake you.

“I will come again and take you to be with me forever.

Do you belong?

God has acted; he has provided the means for the forgiveness of our sins and an enduring relationship with him.

Will you put the blood over the door?

Will you trust Jesus and act on that trust today?

If you will, then declare your faith in Christ to someone today.

And then call us and plan to be baptized as your next faith step.

Pray