

The Crossing

Exodus 13-14

Two weeks ago the battle was fought and the battle was won and lost.
and in the two weeks since the federal election
we've seen both the victors and the vanquished move into life after the battle.

For most of the combatants the aftermath was not what they expected.
Bill Shorten was expecting to appoint his cabinet,
but he was denied that opportunity
and he wasn't even needed in the factional scuffle to elect his successor,
so he took off and had a few days in Japan apparently.

On the other side of politics,
many of those in the coalition had big holidays planned
because they thought they would be at a loose end after loosing their seats,
but they didn't, and so they had to cancel their plans,
Maybe one of them sold their tickets to Bill, who knows!

Today as we continue in our Exodus series
we are starting to think about *life after the battle*.
Last week we observed the battle in full flight.
In one corner: Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, the world's superpower.
In the other corner: *I am*, The LORD, the one and only God.
The prize: a group of people known as the Israelites;
A group described by God as his firstborn Son.
a group enslaved by Pharaoh as his own workforce.

The battle was waged through a series of 10 plagues:
God bringing disaster upon disaster upon Egypt;
Pharaoh stubbornly refusing to give in to the obviously greater power.
But the decisive blow was achieved after the very last plague,
the plague upon the first born sons. We are told in ch 12:29, that
At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh,
who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the
firstborn of all the livestock as well. ³⁰ Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got
up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without
someone dead.

Of course this wailing was not heard in houses of the Israelites,
because God had told the Israelites to celebrate the very first Passover.
Gathered as families, the Israelites were to sacrifice a lamb,
painting the blood on the doorframes of their houses,
and the LORD would see this blood and *pass over* their houses,
sparing their sons and livestock.

But the Egyptians' households were not spared,
and that was the point at which Pharaoh finally conceded defeat.
Ch 12:31 During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. ³² Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And so the battle was decided.

Of course, the Exodus story is a foreshadowing
of what Christ would achieve over a thousand years later.
As Paul exclaims in 1 Cor 5: Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed!

The battle between the LORD and Pharaoh was symbolic of the larger battle
between God and the spiritual forces of evil.
Human beings are the prize in the tug-of-war between God and Satan:
God wants us because he made us, loves us and has a glorious purpose for us;
Satan wants us because he hates God and wants to destroy his handiwork,
and he does that by leading us to sin
so that we become objects of God's anger and judgment.

And the decisive stroke in this battle was laid when Christ died and rose again.
It's Christ's blood that cleanses us from the sins that Satan has led us to,
and so like the blood of Passover,
it's Christ's blood which enables God's judgment pass over us.

And so in ch 13, the Israelites find themselves at a point similar to where we're at.
The battle has been decided, and like us they are facing life after the victory.
What we'll find in these two chapters, 13 and 14,
is a word from God to the Israelites about the future, the past and the present.
And as we continue as people who've accepted the victory Christ won for *us*,
then these words also speak to our future, past and present.

And so we begin with a word about the future.
Ch 13:1 The LORD said to Moses, ² "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal."
And again in verses 11 and 12 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, ¹² 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.

For the Israelites, the future involved *consecration*
or another and more familiar world we could use is *dedication*.
Life after salvation was a life of *dedication* to God.

This dedication was carried out through a ceremony
where the firstborn Son was consecrated to God.
The firstborn son represented the whole family,
and so by consecrating each generation of sons to God,

the whole nation would re-commit itself to a life lived in service of God.

I remember as a teenager watching a comedy skit
by the Australian comedian Tony Martin.
It was all about his mother's 'good scissors'.
He explains how his mother had a special pair of scissors
that were only to be used by her for special purposes.
He always tried to use the scissors himself
but no matter how secretive he tried to be
she would know when the good scissors were being used for illegitimately.
He'd pull them out of the draw to cut up a piece of paper
and from the clothes line out the back she'd call out "not the good scissors!"

Do you have items like that in your house?
Items that have been set aside for special uses?
This is the idea of *consecration*, an idea with its origins in the Exodus story
but which carries on into our Christian lives today.

The Apostle Paul uses a similar illustration in 2 Timothy ch 2 when he explains that
In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some
are for special purposes and some for common use. And he says to Timothy that we
should see ourselves as instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the
Master and prepared to do any good work.

And so the question for us to day is this: to what ends are our lives consecrated?
Think back over the goals that you've set yourself over the last few years.
What have you dedicated your time, resources and energy towards?
I can think of a number of positive examples within our church
of *godly consecration*: people enrolling in courses of theological study,
people moving overseas to work on the mission field,
new ministries being started, significant donations to godly causes.
Can you, in all honesty, include yourself somewhere on that list?

What are you planning to dedicate yourself to over the *next* couple of years?
Will your life be an instrument dedicated to God's service?
The future God wants from us is one that's *consecrated*;
dedicated to his service.

For the Israelites, the consecration of the firstborn wasn't only about the future,
it also served as a reminder of the past.
Ch 13 v 14 "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. ¹⁵ 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.'
The consecration of firstborn sons was designed to evoke memories
of the night when God rescued the Israelites out of Egypt.

It was just one practice through which subsequent generations of Israelites would learn of God's great act of salvation.

Another practice was the festival of unleavened bread ending in the Passover meal.

Cast your eyes back to ch 13 verse 5 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: ⁶ For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the LORD. ⁷ 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. ⁸ On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.'

The significance of bread without yeast is that it reminded the Israelites
of how quickly they were told to leave the country,
they took dough from the Egyptians for the journey
but didn't have time to add yeast as they usually would.

The Passover was to be eaten with tunics tucked into belts and staff in hand,
again reminding future generations
of how quickly their ancestors had to leave the country.
A modern equivalent might be to eat a meal wearing a full back-back
or carrying a heavy suitcase.

So you can imagine the conversations that were had
in every Israelite household from that generation on.
"Why is our bread so flat daddy?"
 "Well son, when our ancestors were saved it happened very quickly"
"And why have you brought your staff inside?"
 "Well my daughter, our ancestors had to eat and go!"
"Why are our neighbors sacrificing their new lamb?"
"Because when God saved us, he took all the firstborns in judgment."
For the Israel, life after the victory meant a life of remembering the victory!

Those of you who've done some travelling
will know what its like to sample the culture of the country you are visiting.
When we went to the United States a number of years back
Jas and I attended a baseball game at Yankee Stadium.
Now if you have ever been to a professional sporting event in the US
you may know that in some stadiums they hang huge banners, or *pennants*,
commemorating the past championships of the home team.
It's where we get the phrase 'winning the pennant', or 'winning the flag'.
And what do these banners do?
They're a motivation for the team to try and get another flag hung,
maybe they're a motivation for the fans to stay loyal during a dry spell.
"We were successful in the past! It can happen again!"
Remembrance of victories past play an important role in the life of the team.

Now in Ancient Israel

there was an annual reminder of this great victory over Pharaoh.
It was this feast of unleavened bread that included the Passover meal.
It was a festival which said to the Israelites:
'Remember the God who fought and won for us,
let's keep giving him thanks and let's stay loyal to him'.

And in this day and age,

the symbolic meal we share during Holy Communion has a similar role.
We are remembering the victory that Christ has fought and won for us
and by doing so we are strengthened for the task of serving him.

A question then for all of us has to do with how prominent

the memory of Christ's victory is within our own lives.
Each one of us can be driven by so many different memories, can't we?
Memories of past glories that we would love to revisit,
Memories of past traumas that we are still trying to cope with.
What about the memory of what Christ has done for us?
God has always asked his people to remember his acts of salvation;
A well-rehearsed memory of these acts is a great help for Christians.

The need for these memories is well demonstrated by what happens next

Let's skip forward to ch 14 v5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled,
Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We
have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" ⁶ So he had his chariot made ready and
took his army with him. Then verse 9 The Egyptians—all Pharaoh's horses and chariots,
horsemen and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea.

I remember the first person I ever led to Christ

was a young boy named Joseph whom I met
while leading a holiday children's programme when I was a young adult.
I explained the gospel in a children's talk and he placed his trust in Jesus.
The next day, he told me that after the previous day's programme
he was playing with his neighbourhood friends
and he told them about what he had learnt,
only to be met with ridicule from his peers for being religious.
"They called me a Bible Basher!" he said,
which is an old Australian insult that was directed at Christians.

And I remember thinking,

"Isn't that incredible. As soon as this child gives his life to Christ,
Satan is trying to steal him back,
making it hard for him to last the distance,
trying to convince him to give up his faith."

It's the same situation that the Israelites found themselves in.

As soon as Israel is rescued,
the enemy decides he doesn't want to give in that easily and gives chase.

Now when the Israelite see this they freak out!

Ch 4 verse 10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

How short are the memories of the Israelites!

They've forgotten that in Egypt they were crying out to God for help!
They've forgotten the incredible miracles and acts of judgment
that God performed for them through Moses and Aaron!
And so Moses has to remind them to stop fretting
and to trust God in their *present* situation.

Verse 13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

And so God physically puts himself between the Israelites and the Egyptian Army,
He then tells Moses to raise his staff over the sea which is then driven back,
The Israelites cross over on dry ground,
When the Egyptian Army tries to go after them their wheels get stuck,
and then finally God causes the water rush back behind the Israelites
and the Egyptian Army is drowned.

It's an incredible scene,
and it reminds us that life after the victory will still involve battles,
but that God is still fighting for us in the present,
and so we can continue to trust him with our present challenges,
even if we can't make sense of what's going on,
even if we think that trusting in him has been a mistake.

So a question for us: like the Israelites, do we need to be reminded to Stand Firm?
Is there something happening now
where the enemy is frightening you into thinking you've made a mistake?

If you've trusted in Christ you haven't made a mistake!
Stand firm and watch what happens!
God may surprise us as to what he's up to,
so let's allow him do his thing around us
while we remember what he's already done on our behalf
and while we consecrate our future selves to him.

I'll lead us in prayer.

