The Passover Origin Story: The Price of Freedom is Costly

Costly, sudden, and the beginning of a pilgrimage

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, November 1, 2020
PASSAGES	Exodus 12:1-13; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:24-26; Exodus 40:38; Revelation 5:9; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 6:16-18; John 14:1-3
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:52:44 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Israel walked through the blood of a lamb into freedom, and that freedom was costly, it came suddenly, and it set them on a lifelong pilgrimage with God visibly in their midst. Jesus leaned into that story at the Last Supper. When we take the bread and cup, we remember a far costlier sacrifice, a deliverance that is instant, and a journey we walk with Christ present by his Spirit.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The first Passover was a family meal. Celebrating the Lord's Table together as households and communities is a good thing to do.
- The price of freedom is not free. A lamb kept in the house for days, slaughtered by the family, impressed that on the next generation.
- God delivered a people who had known only slavery for generations literally overnight. He can deliver us suddenly too.
- Israel's freedom led into a pilgrimage toward a homeland – and every one of them, not only Moses, could see the cloud and the fire of God's presence.

- At the cross Jesus exchanged his righteousness for our filthy rags, and that exchange was God's own idea.
- In Christ we are freed at once from sin's penalty, from having to obey sin, and from the guilt of offending God.
- Remember what story you are in. The narrative the world hands you is not the one God is writing.

▶ 0:52:44

On the first Sunday of the month Hope Chapel has a long tradition of celebrating the Lord's Table, and Geno wanted to talk about what it means before leading the church in it. He asked those watching from home to get their elements ready – "all of the stuff here is gluten free" – and went to the root of it in the book of Exodus.

The origin story

▶ 0:54:19

God was about to pour out the tenth plague on Egypt, the death of the firstborn, and he told the Israelites to paint blood on their doorposts so that the angel of death would pass over. The meal that marked it was kept by Israel ever after, and Jesus entered into its meaning when he gave the Last Supper.

▶ 0:55:31

> "Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old."
>
> EXODUS 12:3–5 ↗

▶ 0:56:00

It is not the most important thing in the text, Geno said, but notice that they gathered in households and neighbors, sized to the lamb. "I want to commend to all the people of Hope Chapel that it's a wonderful thing to celebrate the Lord's Table together as a family." Thousands of year-old lambs were slaughtered at the same twilight hour, their blood put on the doorposts and lintel, the meat roasted – "that's pretty good" – and none left till morning.

▶ 0:57:37

> "In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover... The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt."
>
> EXODUS 12:11–13 ↗

▶ 0:58:06

A strange way to eat: standing, one hand on a staff, gobbling it down. God was making a point. "He didn't say, I'll be there by 9 p.m." They had to be ready the moment the word came – which Geno applied to us: always be ready to tell people why we have the hope we have in Jesus.

1. Three things about Israel's freedom

▶ 0:59:43

It was costly. They literally walked through the blood of the lamb into freedom. In an agrarian culture a lamb was expensive, but more than that, this one had lived in the house for four or five days, essentially a family pet, and the family slaughtered it, caught the blood and painted the door. That would have made a great impression on the children, and that was the point: God wanted to pass on to another generation how costly their freedom was. "The price of freedom is not free."

▶ 1:01:20

It was sudden. That is what the sandals, belt and staff are about. A people who for ten generations or more had known nothing but slavery under Pharaoh's whip were free overnight. "It must have been frankly overwhelming, an emotional shock." And that is the nature of our God: "He can deliver us quickly from the bondage we find ourselves in, and we should trust him for that."

▶ 1:02:32

It led to a lifelong pilgrimage. Moses had told Pharaoh, let my people go, that they may worship God in the wilderness. They went not only into the wilderness but through it, toward a homeland where they could flourish as a community – "they weren't headed on a pilgrimage for the sake of the pilgrimage." And the special thing about that journey was that God was in their midst.

▶ 1:04:08

For forty years he led them by a cloud by day with fire in its midst that could be seen at night. "All of them – not just the priests, not just Moses – all of them could see the cloud and could see the fire," and

knew with certainty that their God was there to lead, protect, guide and bless them (Exodus 40:38). Moses was the mediator at the tent of meeting and at Sinai, but the presence was visible to everyone. “I think this is a really wonderful thing.” There is much more in that chapter, Geno added, and the Holy Spirit will show you things in it: “Don’t be intimidated because Geno said there are only three things here.”

2. Jesus leans into the story

▶ 1:06:12

Jesus did not just borrow the imagery; it was the Passover he was eating with his disciples.

> “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”
>
> LUKE 22:19–20 ↗

▶ 1:06:47

Old covenant: Moses, Mount Sinai, the law. New covenant: Jesus, the cross, forgiveness and grace. So the Passover’s three marks apply to the table.

3. Our freedom is costly

▶ 1:07:26

If Israel’s freedom came through costly blood, ours came through blood that cannot be priced: the life of the only begotten Son of God, the perfect Lamb slain for the sins of the world. A lamb died so that a nation of a million or more could gain political and economic freedom. Jesus died so that all people everywhere – “slave, free, male, female, rich, poor” – could be set free from slavery to sin. Revelation pictures some from every tribe, tongue, people and nation before the throne (Revelation 5:9). “God created diversity among people and he loves it. He never intended for diversity to divide us. That’s our sin.” Next to the cross, he said, the first Passover “is actually puny.” The gift is free to us, “but it cost Jesus everything.”

▶ 1:09:56

Paul and Jesus both tell us to do this “in remembrance” (1 Corinthians 11:24–26). Remember his sacrifice: he laid down his life freely, and that still blows Geno’s mind. “That the perfect Lamb of God would look at a cur like me and go, I like that guy, I’m gonna give my life for him.” (A cur, he explained,

is a mangy street dog.) Looking at himself forty-five years earlier, he would not have thought himself worth it. “I still don’t – and I’m not punishing myself here. That’s just the truth.”

▶ 1:11:49

Remember the exchange: he takes our sin, and we receive his righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). “Here, you can have a robe of righteousness. He takes it off his back, wraps it around us, so that we’re not judged in the presence of a holy God, and he wears our filthy rags.” And remember whose idea it was. “God pursued you and he pursued me. He came after you on his own. It originated in the heart of God.” That should raise gratitude, worship and adoration in us.

4. Our freedom is sudden

▶ 1:13:21

Faith in Jesus brings instant deliverance. **From the penalty of sin:** our status as people deserving punishment is wiped out at once, because the penalty fell on Christ. People tell Geno, “Come on, Christian man, that’s too easy.” His answer: “Yeah, it’s pretty easy, but it’s also costly. It’s called grace. And guess what, Mr. Person-Far-From-God, you cannot possibly live a life good enough for God. So what is your remedy? I like the one I’ve got. You can keep yours.”

▶ 1:15:20

From obedience to sin. In Romans 6 Paul pictures a slave chained to a master who yanks the chain. In Jesus the chain is clipped. We still hear it rattle, and sometimes we react – “oh, I’ve got to go that way” – but we no longer have to. Do we still obey sin? Often. But as we grow in Christ and walk the way of freedom, “we obey less and less and less when the chain begins to rattle.”

▶ 1:16:26

From the guilt of offending God. We are immediately forgiven. “Walk through the blood – oh, that’s behind you. It’s all gone.” That is what Jesus calls us to remember: how wonderful this new relationship is, how quickly it was given, how free we really are. “Our eternal status changed instantly. Lord, forgive me, take me as your own.”

5. Lifelong pilgrims

▶ 1:17:34

Moses led Israel forty years toward the promised land and died on its edge. Jesus has promised us a home: “I go to prepare a place for you… I will come again and will take you to myself” (John 14:1–3).

Our life belongs to Christ, who bought it with his blood, and this life is a journey – "pick your favorite adventure story, maybe *The Lord of the Rings*."

▶ 1:18:43

Geno's friend Steve Hawthorne says it matters to remember what story you are in. "Have you embraced a narrative about your life that's handed to you by the world that hates you? Or are you going to embrace the narrative of what it means to be in Christ?" – an origin story of costly grace and freedom, heading through a pilgrimage to ultimate freedom.

▶ 1:19:54

And as Israel watched the cloud lift and move and the fire at night, we have God in our midst in the Holy Spirit, "whose only job it is is to teach us about Jesus, to reveal Jesus to us," giving spiritual and even emotional intuition to sense Christ's presence in other people and among us. Hawthorne again: that is what we are to remember. "Remember that Christ is in us, with us, for us, leading us, protecting us, blessing us. Do this, and remember to remember."

▶ 1:21:43

The story we are in has us following Christ through his blood into freedom and into the whole world, part of his work to bring some from every tongue and tribe. Not everyone becomes a missionary: "I mean walk across the street, talk to your relatives." And it means never agreeing with the voice that says, "You're alone, give it up." Every day we can say, "Christ Jesus, what are we going to do today?" He named the devil's lies plainly – "that doesn't work for you, you're not important enough to Jesus" – so the church could recognize them. "We are in a war to the death, yes. But Jesus wins, and we win with him."

At the table

▶ 1:24:23

There is much to remember, but the main thing is the cross. And Jesus adds, "until I come," so there is a forward look too: we are with him and he is with us in this pilgrimage. "These things, dearly beloved, are very, very marvelous. So let's partake with marvel in your heart."

▶ 1:25:36

Before the elements, he asked the church – two days before the 2020 election, in a nation already divided and polarized, angry from the pandemic and racial tensions – to pray for the peace of Christ to dwell first in his church. "If the church will walk in peace, our nation will probably have peace. I believe that." Then he blessed the bread and cup and invited everyone to come.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Exodus 12:3–5
- Exodus 12:11–13
- Exodus 40:38
- Luke 22:19–20
- Revelation 5:9
- 1 Corinthians 11:24–26
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Romans 6:16–18
- John 14:1–3

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. The first Passover was eaten by households and neighbors. How might celebrating the Lord's Table together as a family or group change the way you experience it?
2. A lamb that had lived in the house for days made the cost of freedom unforgettable. What helps you feel the cost of your own freedom in Christ?
3. Of the three sudden freedoms Geno named – from sin's penalty, from having to obey sin, from guilt – which do you find hardest to believe is really yours?
4. Steve Hawthorne asks what story you are in. What narrative has the world handed you, and how is it different from the one God is writing?
5. If Christ is in our midst as the cloud and fire were for Israel, how would it change your week to begin each morning by asking him what the two of you are going to do that day?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt preached this message on the first Sunday of November 2020, when Hope Chapel keeps its long tradition of celebrating the Lord's Table, and led the church in communion after it. He credits his friend Steve Hawthorne with shaping how he thinks about remembering the story we are in, and that week he called the church to pray for peace ahead of the national election.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ELHtJrCsQk&t=3164s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.