Remember God's Deliverance

03/22/20

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At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock.
30 Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. 31 Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, "Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD, as you said. 32 Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!" 33 The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said, "We shall all be dead." 34 So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders. 35 The Israelites had done as Moses told them; they had asked the Egyptians for jewelry of silver and gold, and for clothing, 36 and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And so they plundered the Egyptians. 37 The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. 38 A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. 39 They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves." (Exodus 12:29-39)

1. Marathon des Sables

Have you heard of the "Marathon des Sables"? This marathon, also called the Sahara Marathon is a six-day, 251 km (156 miles) ultramarathon, approximately the distance of six regular marathons. This multi-day race is held every year in southern Morocco in the Sahara Desert. It has been regarded as the toughest foot race on Earth.

The runners run through runes, over rocky jebels, and across white-hot salt plains. The temperatures reach 122 degrees Fahrenheit and the sand is a constant companion. The runners' feet swell and bleed under the pressure and heat, but for the runners, none of this matters.

The runners do this for six days before crossing the finish line. Every year over 1,000 people run the race. While many of us might not sign up for a race like this, we all face similar mental and spiritual challenges in life.

Being at home and social distancing can echo a sense of unease and anxiety.

2. The Tenth Plague

For many of us, this might be the first time that we may be staying at home in isolation. The Book of Exodus tells us that God's people went through a similar experience waiting for God's deliverance from Egypt. Exodus 12:29 and the following talks about the 10th plague in Egypt. When Moses asks Pharaoh to let his people go, Pharaoh rejects Moses's request. God brings many plagues to Egypt. Until God performs the 9th plague, Pharaoh does not let the Israelites go.

Then comes the final plague. When God performs the 10th plague, every firstborn child of the Egyptians dies. Pharaoh's firstborn son also dies. During the night, Pharaoh and the Egyptians raise a great cry. The Egyptians say that the Israelites should depart immediately. Pharaoh sends his officers to order Moses to leave right away. In order to expedite their departure, the Egyptians supply the Israelites with gold and silver. Why do the Egyptians want the Israelites to leave as soon as possible? It is because the Egyptians were afraid that any delay might punish Egypt with the death of the whole nation.

What happens to the Israelites when God performs the 10th plague? Nothing happens to them. Not a single child dies. God keeps His promise that if the Israelites place the blood of the lamb on their door frames, the children of the Israelites would be saved. This miraculous event is called Passover. Passover is one of the most important holidays for the Jews and is celebrated to remember the deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

3. Passover: A New Beginning

Verses 37 and the following tells us that over 600,000 people depart Egypt. The total number of those who departed is much more than that. The 600,000 are only those who are 20 and older males. The entire body of those who departed would have been around 2 million people counting women and children. Verse 38 says, "***a mixed crowd also went up with them***." Who is this mixed crowd? The crowd would have been the Egyptians and others who would have wanted to leave Egypt with the Israelites.

The Passover is certainly a new beginning for the Israelites. Today during Passover, Jews take part in the Seder meal, which incorporates the retelling of the Exodus and God's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Each

participant of the Seder experiences this in a personal way and a national celebration of freedom through God's intervention and deliverance.

4. Passover and Jesus

In Luke 22:15-16, Jesus says, "***I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins.*** ***16*** ***For I tell you now that I won't eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God***" (NLT). Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover. 1 Corinthians 5:7 also says, "***Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed."*** Jesus is the lamb of God, sacrificed to set us free from the bondage to sin. The blood of Jesus covers and protects us, and his body is broken to free us from eternal death.

To remember the sacrifice of Jesus, John Wesley said the Lord's Supper to be "the grand channel whereby the grace of his Spirit was conveyed to the souls of all the children of God." This is one of the reasons Wesley received the sacrament at least weekly most of his life.

5. God's Power

The Bible tells us that the Israelites are God's chosen people. Yet they suffered a lot. Why did the Israelites suffer in Egypt and in the wilderness? When Jacob moved from Palestine to Egypt, the total number of his family was 70. In 430 years living in Egypt, the over 20 years old male Israelites were 600,000. Even today, people of Jewish origin often have many children. When we visited Israel last year, our rabbi host had 11 children. The people believe that having more children is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. God says to Abraham. ***"Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be"*** (Genesis 15:5).

God wants Abraham and his descendants to know how much God cares about them and how powerful He is. Why does the Lord perform 10 plagues before the Israelites' departure from Egypt? Exodus 10:2 says, "***you may tell your children and grandchildren how I have made fools of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them—so that you may know that I am the Lord."*** God wants Moses to share his miraculous experiences with his descendants. The 10 plagues are to show, not only to Pharaoh, but also to the people of Israel and their descendants of God's love.

6. Conclusion

Our current situation has changed our society including our Sunday worship. Yet despite the negative impact, our crisis has reminded us of our trust in the Lord and our need to rely on Him.

No one knows when our current challenges may end. Many guess that it may be weeks to a few months. What can we share with those who don't believe in God or Jesus?

Paul says to the Corinthians, "***For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. …*** 18 ***So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever***" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Our current challenges don't diminish our faith but push us to realize that God is in charge and that God delivers His people. Like the Israelites in the Exodus, this time is our time to expect and experience God's almighty power.

7. Application

In the ups and downs of life, we remember how we felt in those situations. We may have felt as if our world was turned upside down. What then do we make of our current situation? We may be tempted to blame others. Instead, I hope that we would remember the words of Psalm 46.

"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. 2 So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. 3 Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge! 4 A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High. 5 God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it. 6 The nations are in chaos, and their kingdoms crumble! God's voice thunders, and the earth melts! 7 The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress. 8 Come, see the glorious works of the Lord: See how he brings destruction upon the world. 9 He causes wars to end throughout the earth." He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; he burns the shields with fire. 10 "Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world." 11 The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress."

Don't forget how God has been helping us. Remember God's deliverance. Amen.