

## Introduction

- **Rico Tice** tells story of taking someone he hardly knew out for lunch. Met on steps of church. Queued up at cash machine to get some money out to buy lunch - **forgot his PIN number** - put in other numbers, eg photocopier number, etc! - extremely embarrassed - as if getting other person to pay for lunch!
  - or have you ever shop-lifted - having forgotten to pay!
  - or names of people you've known for years, especially as visitor
  - so easy to forget - and can get us into trouble!
  - some things are so hard to remember
- In Exodus 12 we are presented with a historical event that **God is determined his people will not forget** - that they will remember:
  - for this was their VE day - **victory in Egypt day!**
  - years of oppression under an anti-Semitic tyranny ever bit as vicious as Hitler's fascism...
  - all of that was at an end, over
  - what they suffered was horrific! newborn babies into the Nile - imagine that! Mother goes through pregnancy & labour - then midwife drowns the child! Horrendous!
  - **now Pharaoh has surrendered unconditionally; at last they are free!**
- **And God wanted the circumstances of their liberation engraved on their consciousness for generations to come:**
  - so wisely he gives them 2 things to remember it by...
  - **date** - every year it came round - v.14 - perpetual reminder
  - **picture**, or series of pictures, a teaching story that rehearses all that happened long ago, especially for the children. Annually as a family - **they were to re-enact this drama**, to rehearse it, **imprinting** not just the historical facts but reliving some of the emotional impact of the events in their hearts as well - this chapter is deeply emotional
- We are going to focus on just **two frames** from this annual drama which the book of Exodus attaches to the Passover festival that we want to focus on:
  - burned into our mind - two pictures associated with a date in the calendar
  - two pictures that those people HAD to remember
  - because these 2 pictures are of vital relevance to the experience of every one of us, 4000 years later!
  - everyone of us needs to understand these pictures...

## Picture 1: Society Devastated by Death - Judgement (v.29,30)

- Heavy!
  - **read verses again...**
  - can you imagine how awful that must have been?
  - seeing the words on the page, particularly if we are familiar with them, can blunt the emotional impact - but just try and put yourself back in the situation
  - all over the countryside you can hear mother's wailing, wailing in the darkness; you can hear the cries of parents mourning the loss of their children, helplessly weeping over their dead, lifeless bodies; the heartbeat had gone out of those houses - they would never be the same again
  - children are so often what give houses life and joy
  - at a stroke - we've got to feel this - every family in the land had been deprived of its most precious possession. Few disasters in the history of the world could have been as heart-breaking as this
  - think of a child you know - now think of that child suddenly dying - emotionally very traumatic
  - some of the Jewish women would remember back to their own tears of a generation before when their own sons had been cast into the Nile...
  - ...but that had been Pharaoh's doing - part of his genocidal hate campaign

- but now, ironically, the boot was on the other foot. Now even Pharaoh knew how it felt to lose a child.
- **And this time it was God's doing**
  - the text doesn't try and get round this embarrassing truth
  - .v29 - **the LORD** - blunt - can't get round it - **does it shock you?** I hope it does!! I'm sure its meant to do so.
  - first image God intends Passover to be associated in people's minds is **an image of terror!**
  - eat in haste (v.11) - or eat it in **FEAR** - wouldn't you be eating in fear, hearing all around you the screams and cries as your neighbours in their houses lost sons?
- This is the picture of a **Society Devastated by Death** - on an appalling scale
  - if we would have dealings with the God of the Bible, this picture must be in our minds;
  - the author does not put the picture there maliciously... he puts it there because **we need this picture of God in our minds!**
  - some people refuse to take this imagery on - they prefer to think of God as a kind of kindly grandfather who would never do anybody any harm - no room for a Jehovah who would kill firstborn children.
  - whole thought of that revolts them - they are only interested in a God who wears a smile on his face. Talk to some theologians and they'll say Judgement is some kind of impersonal force - but that won't do - Exodus quite deliberately uses the first person singular pronoun: (v.12) **"I will pass through Egypt... I will strike down every first born ... and I will bring judgement"**
  - God is personally involved in this action - he is punishing Egypt himself
  - others will say that a **"God of vengeance"** is a primitive, OT idea - but Jesus came to put it all right... God is a loving heavenly father
  - *that won't hold water either: [he] will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:41,42)*
  - Jesus' words!
- Jesus is most explicit on subject of God's judgement in NT
  - if you want to believe in a God who would never hurt a fly, that is your privilege - you can do so - **but that God is an idol manufactured in your imagination!**
  - it isn't the God of the Bible, and not the God of Jesus
  - the God of the Bible is dangerous
  - don't misunderstand: nothing capricious or fickle or impulsive in God's actions here... this awful death sentence only pronounced after **9 other plagues** have been pronounced, building up in severity.
  - at each stage, God is **warning them again and again and again** - he always warns us before judgement
  - trouble is that unbelieving people refuse to heed those warnings
  - week after week, month after month, year after year, they will not heed these warnings - **how many times has God warned you?** There is an irrational obstinacy about us - like Pharaoh, we harden our hearts and we do it so defiantly, and so repeatedly that, as in Pharaoh's case, repentance is no longer possible for us. All that is left is judgement - this situation has not changed in the passing of 4000 years.
  - the death of the first born is a terrible thing - but it is not more terrible the fate that awaits a godless society today, **it is not more terrible than hell.**
  - **if we want to understand the Passover, first picture we've got to get in our minds, is of an entire society, the most civilised and developed society in the world at the time, devastated at a stroke by the judgement of God.**
  - yes, it is a difficult picture, but if you will not entertain it, you will not understand this passage - it will mean nothing to you!
- Without it, the second frame in God's drama will make no sense!
  - and that is the picture of the door stained with blood, picture of Sacrifice

## Picture 2: Door Stained with Blood - Sacrifice (v.12, 13)

- read verses again...
- Crucial to remember - this is not a story of racial discrimination:
  - Jews do not escape because they are Jewish
  - in their own way, they've been every bit as obstinate and unbelieving as Pharaoh! complainers
  - in the absence of any other factor, Israelite firstborn will die alongside every other firstborn
  - when God steps in in final judgement like this, his justice is always totally impartial
  - nobody safe from this judgement - God no favouritism
- But there was a way of escape:
  - God does not pretend that the Israelites are innocent
  - such a judgement would not be true, and he is a God of truth!
  - so no blanket forgiveness - would make a mockery of his justice
- Rather God makes a provision for anyone who wants to take it
  - a provision that averts the judgement
  - instead of destroying those families, it becomes the means of their deliverance from slavery - rather than destroyed, they are freed
- v.3: key to provision is a lamb
  - a lamb for each household
  - what difference does a lamb make?
- 2 clues to tell us why a lamb necessary:
  - (i) v.13 - significance of the blood... blood was there for God to see - not for the Jews to see!! Blood didn't make any objective change to the people in the house - but as long as the blood stood between them and God in his judgement, it averted his anger and they were saved - the blood worked a change - not in Israel but in God's attitude to Israel!!
  - (ii) put self in situation of Jews - you are a firstborn son, wake up alive next morning - next door firstborn son is dead, in your home the lamb is dead but you are alive! substitution - lamb died in place of son
- Theologically: propitiation (blood turns aside judgement, appeased and placated God) and substitutionary (lamb dead instead of son)
- This is the picture the Passover wants to burn into our minds
  - alongside the reality of divine judgement
  - see judgement... then see the blood on the door lintels
  - people don't like this either - how primitive, how gory, etc, that God would want blood...
  - but if there was any 1st born son in Egypt who survived he knew that if he'd adopted such a sceptical attitude towards God's need for blood to stand between the sinner and judgement he'd be dead!
  - every surviving eldest son knew that the lamb had died in his place!

## Conclusion

- Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he'd given thanks he broke it....
  - now do you begin to see why these pictures are more than antiquarian ritual!
  - no coincidence that the occasion when Jesus spoke those words was a Passover meal!
  - the pictures were to be in his disciples minds - only difference, this Passover had no lamb on the table - this is my body, etc - he is the lamb...
  - we too are in a situation of judgement; that is reality!
  - our culture does its best to run away from this disturbing truth, that we are under judgement - all superstition, don't really believe it, do you? we think we have science, wealth, civilisation: who is the Lord that I should obey him? That is what Pharaoh said in his pride - and God said, "No, you are wrong.... you will be

judged"

- God will not sentimentally turn a blind eye to our sin. Not in his nature
  - he is just and holy, punishes sin and wrong-doing
  - there only one way of escape - the blood of the lamb - that is what the whole Bible is about
  - Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us, says Paul
  - you are redeemed with the blood of a lamb, says Peter
  - that is the extent of God's love for me - that he should send his son to die in my place - this way he has set love upon me!
  - I must be very valuable, if God has sent his son to die for me - and my sin must be very serious
  - real lamb was not slain in Egypt that night - but on the Cross at Calvary
  - real blood that satisfies the justice of God not that sprinkled on a wooden door frame but that poured out on a wooden Cross
- So how good are we at remembering that day?
  - is Good Friday a date in our diaries?
  - are these pictures burnt into our minds and hearts?
- Judgement - could easily have been ours!
  - Jefferson - I tremble for my country when I think that God is just
  - that picture of judgement could be ours
  - then there is picture of shed blood, that stands between us and the judgement of God
- Everyone here stands in one or the other picture: judgement or sacrifice
  - every human stands in one or the other
  - where do you stand?
  - if not a Christian I plead you take warning seriously - he is not playing games, he is holy, he will judge sin - this is the biggest problem in your life - so carve out time to investigate- eg "Start!" in May...
  - perhaps you are in 2nd picture: do you know the joy of sins forgiven? he is on the Cross for you in your place - how grateful are you?
  - Often when we start complaining about the Christian life it is because we have forgotten the Cross - I need to think again, and become again grateful - then things get back in kilter - have we forgotten the body and blood....