

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for March 21: Amazing deliverance

March 9, 2010

One of my favorite childhood movies is *Anne of Green Gables*. Anne is an orphan adopted by Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, 60-year-old siblings, who live on a farm. Anne is a spirited little girl who talks too much and has a wonderful imagination. Although she tries hard to be good, her whimsical nature and lack of social grace often leads to trouble.

For instance, after being warned multiple times by Marilla to cover the plum-pudding sauce, Anne still leaves the cover off and to her horror a mouse drowns in it. On another occasion, Anne accidentally serves red current wine to her best friend, Dianna, instead of non-alcoholic raspberry cordial. As a result, Anne is forbidden from seeing her friend.

Even though mishaps like these plague Anne's life, her spirit never is downcast for long. Optimistically, at the end of a difficult day she will say, "Tomorrow is always fresh with no mistakes in it." Anne believes each day is a chance to start over with a clean slate.

As followers of Christ, we too know that God's grace is new every morning. As Scripture tells us, "Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

In our lesson for today, the Israelites are finally free to leave Egypt. This lesson is about God's efforts to give Israel a fresh start.

Exodus 12

When Moses confronts Pharaoh and asks that he let the Israelites go, Pharaoh replies with an unyielding, “No way is that going to happen.” As a result, a battle ensues between God and Pharaoh whereby God makes his power known to Pharaoh and all of Egypt through a series of plagues.

The plagues destroy Egyptian crops and livestock, devastating the land to the point that Pharaoh’s officials encourage the release of the slaves. Yet, Pharaoh’s heart remains hard and he still refuses to let the people go.

The 10th plague is the culmination of this battle and the focus of our lesson. It is the ultimate blow. Unlike the plagues of frogs, locust and gnats, the loss of the Egyptian’s firstborn cannot be reversed. Now, Pharaoh will experience retribution for his attempts to control the Israelite population by killing their male children. Pharaoh and all of Egypt with him will grieve as the Israelites once grieved. Yet, what constitutes an unbearable time of grief for the Egyptians is a time of renewal for Israel. It is a new beginning. Finally, they get to leave Egypt.

In preparation for their departure and this 10th and final plague, God tells the Israelites to prepare a lamb for each family. God gives very specific instructions about how the lamb is to be cooked and eaten.

God tells them to roast it over a fire and to eat it with their cloaks tucked into their belts and their sandals on their feet. These instructions seem strange, but God wants them to do everything with haste, because they are preparing to leave Egypt for good.

It might be like God saying to us today, “Microwave the lamb. While it is cooking, pack your bags. Ladies, put your purse on your shoulder. Men, make sure you have your wallet. Then, with your car keys in hand, eat quickly. Hurry up, it is time to go.”

God also tells them to spread some of the lamb’s blood on their doorframes.

As God passes through Egypt striking down the firstborn, the blood will be a sign to God to pass over their houses, sparing everyone inside. By painting the blood on their doorframes, they are placing their trust and faith in God. Ultimately, the blood is a symbol of God's divine protection over Israel. Households without this symbol will experience the judgment of God. They will lose their firstborn children and animals. Through this, Egypt will finally know the full power of God.

After losing his own child, Pharaoh releases the Israelites from slavery. The Passover meal then, becomes a powerful, lasting ordinance for Israel. They commemorate their deliverance from Egypt by celebrating it year after year.

Surely, it is no coincidence that on the night Jesus is betrayed, the synoptic gospels record that he eats the Passover meal with his disciples. Around the table, Jesus institutes a new celebration, the Lord's Supper. It is not a feast of lamb and bitter herbs. No, this new feast consists of bread and wine, which represent the body and blood of Jesus.

When we take part in the Lord's Supper, we are celebrating our redemption through Christ; we remember that Christ is our Passover lamb, the means by which God spares people today. Yet, the Lord's Supper also is fulfillment of God's redemptive work, which began long ago with a people called Israel.

The Hebrew people's deliverance from Egypt is a new beginning; it really marks the birth of Israel as a nation. In fact, the exodus is so significant in their history that from now on God orders their entire calendar to be oriented around this event. The month they are set free is to mark the start of their new year. Now, when they look at a calendar they will think about how God delivered them.

As they set out into the wilderness on a journey with God, how fitting that

they begin a brand new year. They leave Egypt full of faith and trust that God will continue to take care of them.