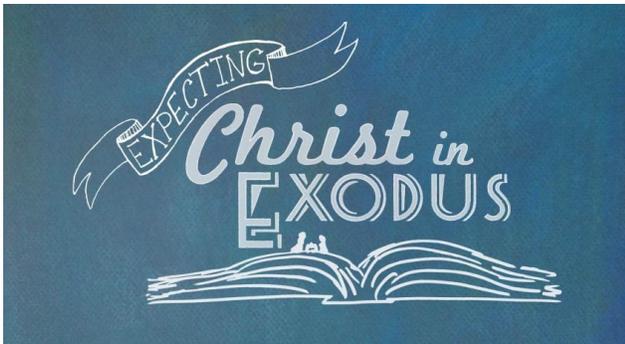


Expecting Christ in Exodus
The LORD Will Atone for Our Sins
Advent 2014 Sermon Series
Exodus 17:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
December 14, 2014

TEXTS: Exodus 17:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

We continue this morning in our Advent sermon series *Expecting Christ in Exodus*. This is the time of year when we draw our attention to the coming of Christ as Savior of the world. My



prayer throughout this series is that we would see Christ with the same eyes as those who first saw Him; that we would behold Him in the very ways that they describe; and that our hearts would be set on fire to share Him, as theirs were.

We began in the first week with the profound parallel that Matthew sees in the Lord's protection over the Savior's birth as he draws comparison between the first deliver, Moses, and the second Deliverer, Christ. Last Sunday, we saw that the Lord will reveal His holy arm, performing mighty deeds to save, as Luke showed us with Mary's song, that the Lord has reached down from heaven to lift us up, as He did in days of old. This morning, we turn our attention to the saving work of Christ, the work of Christ on the cross. We began with His birth, His public ministry, and now we look prophetically at the work of Christ to atone for our sins on the cross. We heard two passages of Scripture read which may seem utterly unrelated to each other. They may also seem to have nothing to do with Christmas, and yet, in fact, they have that road, that Charles Spurgeon spoke of, that in every village and every hamlet in England there is a road that leads to London, so in every passage of Scripture, there is a road that leads to the Person and the glory of Christ. We will take that road again this morning. I want us to see in Exodus 17 the Lord's intention and commitment to atone for our sins, and together we will follow the trajectory of this text into the New Testament. I hope these will convict each of our hearts.

Let's look first at Exodus 17, which is in the weeks after the coming out of Egypt. In Exodus 17, the Israelite community had passed through the waters of the sea by God's saving action to bring them through on dry land. They had come out into the wilderness area, and they thirsted

because the water was bitter. God made the water sweet in Exodus 15. In Exodus 16, He provided food for them to eat, manna and quail. Now, in chapter 17, the whole community is setting out from the Desert of Sin. This is the desert, not of *sin*, like the English word, but the wilderness area that is known as Sin like Sinai. It is not a statement about a place you go for sinning, it's not the Las Vegas of the Ancient Near East. It is a location, and they head into this area, traveling from place to place. Notice that initially, in this first verse, they travel according to the command of the Lord, literally according to the mouth of Yahweh, Exodus 17:1:

“The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded.”

God's instructions, His presence, is among them, guiding their every step. This is very important to notice, as the narrative unfolds. They journey, and God provides them nourishment. They set out from this area and are traveling by the command of God. He is guiding their every step. They move from the Desert of Sin, and they camp at a place called Rephidim. We notice from the text that in this place of Rephidim there is no water in the area for the people to drink. You can live for a certain amount of time without food; you can live for a shorter time without water. You can live for an extremely short time without water, though, in a wilderness area like this. The adversity of the situation for people without anything to drink exposes their lack of confidence in the Lord. It is true that adversity can sometimes expose that our faith is shallower than we think. And so, they are there with no water to drink. We hear in Exodus 16 that God allows these experiences of adversity to strengthen their faith, and that God is, in fact, testing them. In Exodus 17:2, we read:

“So they quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’”

The NIV translation *quarrel* obscures that there is actually a technical term used here. It is the vocabulary of a covenant lawsuit that is used. It is not that they're just having an argument with Moses; it is that they are considering taking legal action against him. It is like a union move against the management. The people are binding together, and they are placing a charge, not an argument. They are bringing legal action against Moses, saying: “Fulfill all our demands; give us water to drink.” Moses recognizes that the legal action that the people are taking is not fundamentally against his leadership. It's against the owner of the company, if you will. Moses replies in Exodus 17:2:

“Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?”

Why do you bring legal action against me? In fact, you are bringing God to the test; you are bringing God's faithfulness into question. As the narrative plays out, we will see that the question lurking in the minds of the people is this: “Is the Lord among us or not? Can God really be trusted? Even though He conquered the Egyptians six weeks ago, split the waters of the sea open, and we walked on dry land, can He be trusted, or not? Is He here, or has He forgotten

about us?" The real issue is the faithfulness of God. The people thirst in this place, and they grumble against Moses, and their irate condition starts to boil over. In Exodus 17:3, they speak to Moses with this piercing accusation:

"Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

Notice that God is absent from the formulation: "Why did you bring us out here anyway? Did you bring us out here to slay us, to kill us, to kill us and our children and our livestock with the thirst? Why did you bring us to this place?" We receive a powerful lesson in godly leadership in Moses' response to this legal action. It is to go to God. I wonder how many of our difficult relational circumstances around the holidays would be altered if we went to God first, as Moses does. He doesn't just go to God; he cries out to God in Exodus 17:4:

"What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

Notice that this is not the action of mob violence; this is a religious execution that Moses feels the threat of. He turns to God in adversity, realizing that the situation is about to go out of control: "They are ready to stone me." Moses goes to God seeking God's assistance, help, and direction, and God, because He is the living God, responds. The response to Moses and the narrative slows down in Exodus 17:5:

"The LORD answered Moses, 'Walk on ahead of the people.'"

Imagine this scene: There are 600,000 families gathered around; God has just rescued them from Egypt; there is grumbling, legal action, taken in accusation of God and his messenger. The Lord speaks and says to Moses: "Walk ahead, or literally pass before out in front." Moses is told first of all to move out, away from the people, and they see this. He moves out, away from the people; he then takes with him some of the leadership of the community, so the grumbling, complaining group, the union strike line, if you will, are surrounding the establishment. Moses steps away, with some of the leadership of the people with him, and they move on aside, and then God tells Moses in Exodus 17:5 to take his staff of judgment, the ruling staff:

"And take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go."

He was to pass in front of the people. The scene is us, saved by the mighty, outstretched arm, complaining, grumbling, and wondering if God is among us or not; living like He is not; calling into question His faithfulness. Then, here's Moses, with some of the leadership, passing back and forth in front of the people with the rod in his hand raised. This is the rod that we saw him strike the river with; the rod that he took down the gods of Egypt with; the rod of judgment in his hand passing before the people. It would be impossible for us not to grasp the symbolism of what was playing out before us: Moses, the servant of God, the rod of judgment in his hand, and yet at the very command of God, Moses raises the rod of judgment; but what happens next

is one of the most amazing incidents in the entire Bible. As God tells Moses to take that rod of judgment that was in his hand, the 600,000 of us must have been looking over and thinking: "Oh, no, whose idea was this? We should have kept our mouths closed!" The rod of judgment is raised, and Moses is walking back and forth in front of the people with some of the leadership. Brace yourselves for the blow. What happens next is astonishing. The Lord tells Moses in Exodus 17:6:

"I will stand there before you upon the rock at Horeb."

God told Moses He would position Himself before his face. This is startling. All of us must appear before the face of God. Here, however, God says to Moses: "I will position Myself in front of you.," He tells Moses to take the outstretched rod of judgment, and strike. The blow does not fall upon the people. The blow falls upon the Lord God Almighty standing in front of the rock. God says in Exodus 17:6:

"Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."

God stands before Moses in the place of the guilty one, in the place of the accused, and the penalty of judgment that deservedly should come down upon us falls upon Him. What amazement and awe Moses must have felt to strike this blow, and when he does, life-giving water flows from the rock, and the people drink and live.

This remarkable scene is described and interpreted for us in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4a:

"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; . . ."

Paul said he didn't want them to be ignorant, since the worst kind of ignorance is bring unsure about who God is and what He has done. He then goes on to explain this life-giving water in 1 Corinthians 10:4b. He says:

". . .for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."

Paul says that rock was Christ; that blow that you and I deserve, the blow that falls on the Lord, that's Jesus Christ. Isaiah 12:3-4 says:

"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: 'Give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the peoples.'"

The joy of Christmas is the joy of having your sins forgiven. The joy at the heart of Christmas is that the blow that you and I rightly face falls on the Lord on our behalf. But, the joy of Christmas is unknown to many; it is unknown to many modern people.

I spent some time this week just randomly exploring awareness of this as the joy of Christmas. My heart was so gripped by this scene of God's taking the blow for us that I probed as I moved around greater Cincinnati. I want to share with you some of what I found. I



I picked up a book in the library by the English writer Peter Watson. It is a large, long book. I didn't read the whole thing, but it was about the making of the modern mind. Watson does a brilliant job of discussing the men and the women who have shaped how we think today, an intellectual history of the 20th century. It was an interesting book, but I looked in the index to see if there was any discussion in this thousand page book on sin or guilt. Would you believe that those topics never occurred? I also looked at a study published by Karl Menninger, a famous psychologist. He wrote a book called, *Whatever Became of Sin?* He said:

“In all of the laments and reproaches made by our seers and prophets, one misses any mention of 'sin,' a word which used to be a veritable watchword of prophets. It was a word once in everyone's mind but now rarely heard. Does that mean that no sin is involved in all our troubles? Is no one any longer guilty of anything? Guilty perhaps of a sin that could be repented of or atoned for?...

“Anxiety and depression we all acknowledge, and even vague guilt feelings; but has no one committed any sins? Where, indeed, did sin go? What became of it?”

He then says,

“I believe there is 'sin' which is expressed in ways which cannot be subsumed under verbal artifacts such as 'crime,' 'disease,' 'delinquency,' 'deviancy.' There IS immorality; there IS unethical behavior; there IS wrongdoing; there IS gross ingratitude towards God; there IS living like He's not among us when He has acted in such decisive ways.”

Menninger goes on to say:

“The assumption that there is sin... implies both a possibility and an obligation for intervention, the possibility that something can be done, and that something must involve mercy.”

C.S. Lewis was asked what's so difficult about sharing Christianity with people. He did what only British writers can do: he wrote a very profound amount of content in five pages. He gave four

reasons. The first three are profound, but in the fourth reason he says:

“The greatest barrier I have met is the almost total absence from the minds of my audience of any sense of sin. This creates a new situation for us. The early Christian preachers could assume in their hearers a sense of guilt. Thus the Christian message was in those days unmistakably the Good News. It promised healing to those who knew they were sick. We have to convince our hearers of the unwelcome diagnosis before we can expect them to welcome the news of the remedy.”

The ancient man knew that he stood accused before God as judge; modern people have reversed the roles. Modern man is the judge; God is in the prisoner’s defense box, the dock. The trial is carried out by man. Lewis says we must awaken the conscience of our hearers, but he concludes: “I’m far from believing that I have found the solution.”

There are two signs of hope: one a little bit dark; the other bright as the noonday sun. In one of my anecdotal conversations this week, I met a young man who was unshaven and looked a little rough. I saw him reading at a local store. You know, it can be dangerous when you decide to explore what people are actually thinking around you. I sat next to this man, and when I saw the book he was reading, it broke my heart. It was called, *The Killer Inside Me*. I thought: “I’ve got to ask a few questions about this.” I said: “What’s that about?” He told me it was a book about the mentality of a serial killer. I asked him why he was reading that. He looked at me with this helpless look, and he said: “One of my friends told me that it might help me.” You and I have a responsibility, a big responsibility. That’s a young man who is ripe for the joy of Christmas. That’s not the book that will help him.

The other sign of hope came from a New Orleans Saints tight-end, Ben Watson. Ben Watson spoke out publicly two weeks ago after the Missouri grand jury decided not to indict the Ferguson police officer, Dan Wilson, over the death of 18-year-old Michael Brown: the white officer; the African-American young man. Ben Watson, African-American football player for the New Orleans Saints, spoke, and he said: “I am angry because the stories of injustice continue before our eyes.” He said: “I’m sympathetic though because I wasn’t there and maybe officer Wilson acted within his rights and duties as an officer of the law and killed Michael in self-defense, as any of us would do in similar circumstances, and now he has to fear the backlash where he was just doing his job. Or, maybe he provoked Michael and ignited a series of events that led to his murder to prove a point. I’m sympathetic.” Then he said this: “But I’m encouraged, because ultimately the problem with us is not a *skin* problem; it’s a *sin* problem. Sin is the reason we rebel against authority. Sin is the reason we abuse our authority. Sin is the reason we are racist, prejudiced, and lie to cover our own. Sin is the reason we riot, loot, and burn, but I’m encouraged today,” he said, “because God has provided a solution for sin by His

Son Jesus, and with it a transformed heart and mind, one capable of looking past the outward form and seeing what's inside, important to every human being. The cure is not education; the cure is not exposure; the cure is the Gospel, and so I am encouraged." Then they took him off the air. You see, between the sea and Mount Sinai, God reveals a stroke that cures our wound. Between Christmas and the consummation of all things, we linger at the cross. Spurgeon said: "The cross is worthy of an angel's tongue."

I want you to feel this morning that if God were to bring a blow down in right and perfect reckoning, He would be right to condemn any of us. We live like He's not among us, and yet the Gospel, the joy of Christmas, is that the blow has fallen His Son on our behalf. John Newton, who wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace* had a life that was flagrantly against God's ways. He was a leader in the slave trade, and God rescued him, and saved him, and forgave him. This rough sea captain did what any converted sea captain would do, he started immersing himself in the life



of the local church. Then he did what not every converted sea captain would do: he started immersing himself in learning Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, which I highly respect. But John Newton did something that was unusual for his day. John Newton was very clear and open in his preaching ministry about his own sinfulness. We take that for granted, but he was one of the first to do this,

to really identify from the pulpit with the real temptations and sinfulness of the congregation. He opened his own life and the healing he had received, and he hoped that his preaching would break hard hearts and heal broken hearts. Newton developed a friendship with a man named William Cooper who had a gift with words and poetry. These two men, in their unusual friendship, committed to writing a piece of poetry every week for Sunday service. These poems began to be set to music in a little village called Olney. We know the most famous of these poems, the lyrics for *Amazing Grace*, but I want to share with you the lyrics of another of his poems. It is the response of a heart that has realized its own sinfulness and what God has done in Christ. This poem is called, *In Evil Long I Took Delight*:

"In evil long I took delight,
Unawed by shame or fear,
Till a new object struck my sight,
And stopped my wild career.

I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood,
Who fixed His languid eyes on me,

As near His cross I stood.
Sure, never to my latest breath,
Can I forget that look;
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.
My conscience felt and owned the guilt,
And plunged me in despair,
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,
And helped to nail Him there.
A second look He gave, which said,
'I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid;
I die that thou mayst live.'
Thus, while His death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue,
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too."

Do you know this? If you know this, then you have the joy of Christmas: my sins are forgiven. Yours are forgiven through the atoning death of Christ, our Rock. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we come into Your presence. Lord, we praise You that Your mercy is broad, that Your mercy is specific. We praise You, Lord, that You have stepped out in front of our sinfulness, that You have stepped out in front of our ingratitude, Rock of Ages, to take the blow for our redemption, and that the water and the blood flow out, life-giving, from Your side. Father, I pray now that You would send Your Holy Spirit here to do what only Your spirit can do, and that is to reveal our need for forgiveness. I thank You, Lord, that we don't have a skin problem, but a sin problem, and at Christmas time we remember, as we must remember at every season, that it is Your death, Your atoning death, that makes a way for us. Hallelujah! We praise You, Lord Jesus, Rock of ages cleft for me, and we hide ourselves this morning in You.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.