

Exodus 12:1-13

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[0 : 00] Well, you can tell a lot about a person by what they had as their last meal. I was looking! at a list of famous people and their last suppers on earth this week, as you do. Elvis Presley, his last meal was a meal of ice cream, four scoops, accompanied by four giant chocolate cookies. The captain of the Titanic, just before it went down, Edward Smith, was recorded as having a meal of oysters à la rousse, part of a 17-course epic banquet at the captain's table. Jimi Hendrix had a tuna sandwich. Last meals say a lot about you, don't they, about what sort of life you've lived. What you leave this world, having eaten, says a lot about you as a person, you are what you eat, as they say. Well, in this passage that we just read together, Exodus chapter 12, we're told about the last meal of God's people. Their last meal in the land of Egypt. This is it. It's what all the waiting has been leading up to, isn't it? It's the moment where God's people, the Israelites, finally wave goodbye to Egypt.

Now, it may seem like 400 years since we started to look at this book, but that is how long they've had to wait, isn't it? 400 years of suffering and slavery, and they finally get to leave at last. And their last meal is loaded with significance about who they are. It's a meal that means something.

The meal at Passover, when God came in person to visit the land of Egypt. There was sentencing and judgment, and there was saving, rescuing. And so significant was this meal that God says to them, the calendars of your life are to be reset by it. You will reorientate your whole history around this meal.

Look again at verse 2. This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. What I'm about to do in your lives is so groundbreaking, so pioneering, that it will mean a total change for you. It will mean a new start. It will be as if you've crossed over from death to life.

So the meal of lamb and bitter herbs and unleavened bread that we read about in this chapter is the last meal they will ever eat in Egypt. And it will change them forever. Just think of that, after 400 years.

[3 : 02] It's a monumental moment, isn't it? The last meal they'll ever eat there. And God, through Moses, wants us to see that it tells us something about God's people. You can tell a lot about them by what they eat for their last meal.

So there's a couple of things that I want to draw out from this passage. Firstly, it's a meal that is marked with blood. It's marked with blood. Now, if you're a bit squeamish, this passage is a bit uncomfortable, isn't it?

There is blood all over this passage. It's mentioned three times in those first 12 verses that we read. And the blood there is talking about the blood of the lamb who is killed to be the centre of this meal. It's not for the faint-hearted, is it? Blood is a key part of this meal. Now, I want to help you try and understand why that is. I'm going to give you some words beginning with S that hopefully won't get too complicated and should help you.

First of all, the blood was a sign for safety. It was a sign for safety. Have a quick look at verse 13 again.

[4 : 18] The Lord says, Now, I don't know if you've ever had that nervous fear of having somebody really important come to your town or even your home.

I remember one time, when I was a teenager, when the Queen came to open a shopping centre in Ellesmere Port, where I live, near Liverpool. But we were not prepared for her.

We were not used to being in the presence of royalty. Because her Rolls Royce, as it went through the drive-thru in McDonald's, got stuck permanently.

She had to get out, and a crane had to lift the Rolls Royce out back onto the road. It was a mortifying moment for everybody who was there.

It was incredibly embarrassing. We simply weren't used to being in the presence of royalty. In the papers the next day, one of the staff at McDonald's said, I could have died of shame.

[5 : 32] It was that bad. I wonder if you've ever had that heart-sinking feeling of shame. When you think back to things that you've done and said, and you cringe in embarrassment.

I can't believe I did that. To shame ourselves with one another is one thing, isn't it? But when God visits, it's quite another.

By each other's standards we can feel shame from time to time. But when you're in the company of God, the maker of heaven and earth, it's a wholly different thing.

It's the difference between looking at a reflection of light in the world on objects around us, and looking directly at the sun through a pair of binoculars.

It would blind you, wouldn't it? One Christian thinker talks about that moment of being in the presence of God, with his glory and his goodness and his holiness, and he says it would tear you at the very seams of your humanity.

[6 : 42] You would literally die of shame. And as God visits Egypt, his actual presence will be there. We didn't read it, but in chapter 11, verse 4, he says, I will go out in the midst of Egypt.

And that has a consequence. It brings death to ashamed people. It's his judgment upon them.

And it's only right. To meet God as the people that we are, is to die of shame. But there's a way out.

The blood will be like a signpost on the doors that God will see and move on, pass over them.

That's where the name comes from. A way to be safe from facing God in shame.

A sign for safety, do you see, for his people. But how is that possible? How is it that God seeing this blood is a sign for safety?

[7 : 47] Well, two more words beginning with S. The blood will also be a substitute for satisfaction. A substitute for satisfaction.

Have another look at verse 30 with me in that second part that we read. So this is after God strikes down the firstborn sons of Egypt.

Verse 30. Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all of his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead.

Now, if you're on the ball this afternoon, you might be thinking, well, hang on a minute. You've just said that this blood was a sign for safety. And if the blood was on your house, you'd be safe.

Your firstborn son wouldn't die. But here in verse 30 it says, doesn't it, categorically, that there wasn't a single house where someone had not died.

[8 : 48] In every house, without exception, there was a death. Can you imagine how horrific that would have been at the time?

We're talking about black plague kind of scale here, aren't we? Verse 29. It's universal, isn't it? 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 captive, who was in the dungeon. It didn't matter whether you were a prince or a peasant.

You could not face God and live with the shame. Death was everywhere in the land, in every home. And that's the verdict over every person, no matter what your background.

So, does he really mean that every house had a death in it? Even the Israelites, who had this sign of safety over the doorposts, surely they were safe, weren't they?

[9 : 52] Well, we know that there had been a death in those houses too. Someone had died. It was the lamb, wasn't it? It's quite specific.

The lambs had to be chosen in a certain way, didn't they? I wonder if you noted that in verse 3. All those details, a lamb for each household. If the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbour shall take according to the number of persons.

Why all these details? Well, it's a lamb to meet the exact equivalent of every single person. To be killed at a specific time. Twilight, verse 6.

At the same moment, the lamb dies instead for each and every person. As a substitute. A substitute who God sees and is satisfied with.

As he comes to bring justice on the land. He's happy with the exchange that's made. Have a look again at verse 13. He says, the Lord says, When I see the blood, I will pass over you.

[10:59] No plague will befall you. You'll be safe. Now notice he doesn't say, does he? When I see you, Israelites. He doesn't say that.

It's nothing to do with the goodness of the people. And whether they've got any merit. Whether they're good people or not. He's not impressed with them, is he? It's that he sees the blood. He sees that there has already been a death there that satisfies him. Somebody has already died for the shame of the people. A substitution to satisfy God and bring safety to the people. So it's a meal marked with blood. A meal marked with blood. But secondly, it's a meal that marks a totally new beginning. It's a meal that marks a new beginning. Now life in London is not conducive to long lunch hours, is it? And sitting around having long meals. We are a microwave meal ready culture.

[12:06] Gourmet on the go and all of that. I'm sure we've all had that uncomfortable experience of indigestion as we eat food with a limited time because we've got to get on to the next thing.

We eat fast because there are things to be done after the meal. We're thinking about the next project or the next presentation, whatever. Well, can I say we are not the first people to think of fast food for that reason.

Have a look at verse 11. God speaks to Moses, tells him about how they are to eat this meal. He says, in this manner you shall eat it. With your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, your staff in your hand, you shall eat it in haste.

The meal that God's people eat at Passover is to be eaten in haste. Fast food. It wasn't something to sit around and chew over for hours.

It was a meal that intrinsically pointed to what was coming next. It was a meal to be eaten, ready to get on the move to leave Egypt.

[13:13] Just by the way that it was eaten, it spoke of the new beginning in the situation of God's people. They were going somewhere. A meal on the move to something new.

So the next day comes and after the meal everything changes. Now if you were here last week you'll know that as we looked at those nine plagues that come before this.

Pharaoh is consistent, isn't he, in saying no to the people. You cannot leave Egypt. You are staying put. And he is persistent in that.

But look at him after verse 31. After the firstborn sons are killed. Have a look there. Then he summons Moses and Aaron by night and says up.

Go out from among my people. Both you and the people of Israel and go. Serve the Lord as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds as you have said and be gone.

[14:15] And bless me also. You and the people. Aaron, Moses, the lot of you. Go. Go. Go. Be gone. Three times he says it, doesn't it?

It's a total U-turn on what he said before. You, Aaron, the lot of you, go. You see, before the Passover meal, they couldn't leave Egypt.

They were slaves there. But now, they cannot stay. Something monumental has happened. When the lamb dies and they trust in its blood, eating this meal has meant that God's people are forced into a new beginning.

Forced into freedom. It's a great thing, isn't it? They now have to leave Egypt. They are viewed differently by the world. But the world cannot stomach them.

They have to leave. So decisive is what happens at this meal. That is what the blood of the lamb does. And Emma and I, we are dangerously close to getting a bit obsessed with the programme Location, Location, Location.

[15:28] Speak to us afterwards about that. We're about five years behind everybody else because we only ever watch repeats on 4OD over the internet. But I think it's still the same today, isn't it?

Never has there been a time where we are so obsessed with moving house. I guess one or two generations ago, we were pretty happy just staying put, weren't we?

Most of us were born in the same house, often died in the same house, at least in the same town. I guess there are all sorts of reasons for that. Could be economic reasons.

But I think it shows a certain kind of restlessness in our society. We want to keep moving around, don't we? We're not content to stay put where we are.

Are you slightly jealous when you hear of friends and family who say we're moving house? We're moving to a better life, we're moving to a better area to get a different job.

[16:26] I wonder if you want that for your life. Maybe you want a new life altogether, to get away from memories or from hurt or from people that have hurt us.

Wouldn't it be great if there was an offer of a totally new life? Put the past behind you. A new start. A new beginning. Aren't you slightly jealous when you see these people on the eve of freedom eating a meal that they can't quite get down because maybe they've got that excitement, that Christmas kind of feeling the night before where your appetite goes as a child because tomorrow is what you're really looking forward to.

It's their feast to mark a new beginning where they will have to leave slavery. A meal marked with blood.

The lamb dies instead. No shame when they meet God. Shame dealt with. Wonderful. But it's their meal, isn't it?

It's their move. It's their safety. Their new life. Just turn to John chapter 1 with me. John chapter 1.

[17:44] It's on page 1068. 1069, sorry.

We're looking at verse 29. John chapter 1, verse 29. Page 1069. And here we've got John the Baptist, who is a prophet in the New Testament.

And he heralds, he proclaims the arrival of Jesus Christ. John chapter 1, verse 29. The next day, John the Baptist, he saw Jesus coming towards him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

That was their meal, wasn't it? Back in Exodus, their great meal for a new start, for freedom. For the removal of shame. But there is a meal that is still on the table for you and I this afternoon.

The Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus. The one who dies instead. He literally dies of shame on the cross.

[19:05] Of my shame and your shame. So when you and I meet God, he can be satisfied. Not because we're good.

But because there has already been a death. The Lord Jesus. Jesus goes on in John's Gospel. He says, whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.

And I'll raise him on the last day. Now, Jesus is not a cannibalist, is he? He's not talking about literally his body and blood. He's talking there about feeding on him in faith.

To feed off of Jesus is to do just what those Israelites did in Exodus. To trust that his blood shed on the cross and his body will be a sign for your safety.

A meal to take you somewhere totally new. It will mean a change so groundbreaking in your life that you'll never actually be able to turn back from that point.

[20:15] And the world might say to you, go. Go. Be gone. We don't want you around. Before, you couldn't escape that life.

But after Jesus, you won't be able to stay with it. But you won't want to. You'll want it to be the last meal you ever eat in this life.

To feast off of what Jesus has done. A new start. A new beginning. Shame dealt with. The lamb dies instead.

Let's pray.