

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Illus.: Some years ago, Pastor Lloyd Ogilvie was on the phone with a new Christian named Dan. Dan exclaimed, *“Lloyd, what a puny God I had! It was like shutting myself up in a 3 foot square by 7 foot tall hut on the floor of the Grand Canyon. As God kicked in the door, blew off the roof, and knocked down the walls, I beheld his grandeur and glory.”* Pastor Ogilvie said, *“I’ve heard conversion described in lots of ways, but never as vividly as that.”* [#3426; Parables 2/93]
- B. The Bible says in **2 Cor 5:17**, *“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* The stories of new Christians often celebrate things like new-found peace and a change of behavior but at the very heart of Christian conversion is that we come to know the glory of God in Jesus Christ.
- C. The first real conversion story in the Bible isn’t actually about a person but the whole nation of Israel. At the heart of that story is how Israel came to know the glory of the LORD. When God sent Moses to the Israelites held captive in Egypt these were his instructions: **Ex. 6:6-8...** Israel was about to behold God’s grandeur and glory. Turn to **Ex 12.**
- D. We have been studying the story of Israel’s exodus from Egypt. The first 11½ chapters have all been about preparation—of Moses, of Pharaoh and Egypt, and of the Israelites. Now, finally, the devastating blow of the 10th plague strikes Egypt: **12:29-33...**
- E. What happened on that moon-bright midnight has never happened again. Yet it happened *more*—it happened *greater*—when Jesus died and rose again for us. That night in Egypt Israel was born again and set the pattern for our own changed lives in Christ. **So we come to this passage to learn of our own salvation and of our God.**

The striking thing about these verses is Egypt's sudden and total release of Israel. They're not just *released*; they're *ejected*. Exodus is too tame a word. Liberation is more like it. Here's the point:

I. WHEN THE LORD SAVES YOU, YOU CAN LEAVE SLAVERY BEHIND FOREVER (12:29-39)

- A. Christians often feel the pull and power of our old life—of the world, our own nature, and the devil. But despite the struggle, we are now completely free to serve the LORD. Did you notice Pharaoh's verbs: *"Up! Leave! Go! Go!"* Even though Pharaoh would soon change his mind and pursue them—the way the devil pursues you and me now—his power was broken. His authority over Israel was gone. The LORD had set them free to worship and serve him and he couldn't ever get them back. In **Num 33:3-4** Moses remembered the scene: *"They marched out defiantly in full view of all the Egyptians, who were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them; for the LORD had brought judgment on their gods."*

What the LORD did for Israel he does even more for us.

- He not only sets us free from the powers of sin and Satan but he also **gives us his Spirit within us to make holiness natural**. I have a date in my old Bible besides **Rom 8:6 - 9/25/83**. It had been a time of defeat and guilt and I felt helpless. Then I read this verse: *"The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."* Our minds can be controlled by God's own Spirit. He makes us free to be righteous and wise and grace-filled and the result is *life and peace*. So, *"Up! Leave! Go! Go!"*
- B. **V.34-36...** You can almost hear the Egyptians: *"Here, take whatever you want. Just leave!"* Here again we're told how this unlikely army of God, without so much as lifting a weapon, plundered the mightiest nation on earth. Egypt was the greatest power in the world, yet they not only cowered before Israel and their God, but they willingly surrendered their treasures. What's more, **v.38** says that

“many other people went up with them.” Egypt lost not only treasure but other slaves and disillusioned citizens. The mighty Pharaoh was powerless to stop them! And so it is when God delivers us. Through Christ we can plunder the world that once enslaved us—taking its wealth and its people to enrich God’s kingdom. Go ahead! Take the world’s treasures—its money and science and art and businesses—and build something beautiful for God. Raid the world’s slave quarters and invite others to walk with you into freedom. *Plunder the enemy!* **Neither the world nor the devil can hold on to what God wants us to have for his glory.**

- C. When God saves us all that we have to do is leave, and quickly. Wrap your matzoh in a change of clothes and beat tracks. Go! Do not stay a moment longer in the place of slavery. *“Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty I’m free at last!”*
- D. **V.37...** That was a trip of about 20-25 miles. Our biblical scholars puzzle over the number “600,000 men.” This would make the nation of Israel well over 2 million. The large numbers in the Old Testament are notorious difficult to understand and reconcile. Archaeological and translation issues only complicate the matter. However you take this, notice that **the point here in Exodus isn’t how big the nation of Israel was, but that all of them left Egypt.** The punch does not lie in *how many* Israelites there were but that *not one* was left behind.
- E. **V.38...** *“Many other people went up with them.”* Other people groups lived in Egypt. Some were slaves like the Israelites. Others were resident aliens. Whoever they were, these *“other people”* were persuaded that they would be better off casting their lot with the Israelites than the Egyptians. Remember God’s ancient promise to Abraham, *“All peoples on earth will be blessed through you”*? That’s what’s happening here. **Other peoples were**

drawn to Israel and Israel's God. Then, no one had to stay under the power of Egypt any longer, and now no one must remain the slave of this wicked world if they wish to go free. The Bible says, *"Whoever will may come."*

So... Step back from the details now for a moment. Do you see how grand and glorious the LORD is? What other god delivers his people from both slavery and death? What other god dismantles and destroys his enemies like our God. What other god will *"redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment, and will take you as his own people and be your God"*?

God's salvation had two distinct parts. One was breaking the power and grip of Egypt over Israel. **For us, freedom from bondage to sin and Satan.** The other was preserving Israel from death when God passed over and saw the blood of the lamb on their doors. **For us, protection from God's judgment and death.** Here in **vv.40-42** the focus shifts back to the night of the Passover.

Incredibly, all but two of these Israelite men would prove to be faithless. So only two—Joshua and Caleb—eventually entered the Promised Land. But, hypothetically, imagine what it might have been like when any of these people actually faced death later from, say, old age or sickness. They had been inside their blood-marked houses when death's angel had passed over. In a sense, they had already gone through death and lived to tell the tale. So when death came again, wouldn't you think they would see that in a completely different way than everyone else?

II. WHEN THE LORD SAVES, YOU NEED NEVER FEAR DEATH AGAIN (12:40-42)

A. **Vv.40-41...** 430 years. Remember what God said at the beginning of this section in **v.2**, *"This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year."* Four and a third *centuries* and then time was reset. **God's salvation restarts time and sets the calendar to 'everlasting.'**

Whatever your past, however long it was, it stops on the day the LORD saves you and a new life begins. B.C. – Before

Christ—and A.D.—*Anno Domini*, ‘in the year of the Lord.’
On the day God saves you your everlasting life begins.

Your lifespan is no longer indicated by the dates on your tombstone.

- B. **V.42** has this interesting phrase, “*the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt.*” A vigil is “a purposeful surveillance to guard or observe.” On that dark night of death and deliverance the LORD kept guard over his people. God the Sentinel, the Watcher over Israel.

In the same way God kept vigil on Good Friday, when Jesus died in the surreal darkness, when evil ran rampant and the earth trembled. The LORD kept vigil. As Judge he accepted the terrible sacrifice. As Father he heard Jesus’ heartbreaking cry, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.*” As the I AM, the Beginning and the End, he received the Messiah’s triumphant last words, “*It is finished!*” The LORD kept vigil on that unnatural night when salvation was created. Death and debts beyond measure were paid off and condemned sinners were redeemed once and for all by the blood of Jesus Christ.

When God accepted the blood of the lambs at the first Passover in Egypt it cost him nothing. But it was obvious to anyone who thought deeply about it that the death of a lamb is no equivalent to the death of a firstborn son. It is an unequal sacrifice. Those lambs in Egypt were but a promise, whether Israel realized it or not. A prophecy. **A kind of down payment till the Lamb of God was sacrificed as a true equivalent for the sin of the world.** When the true Passover happened and Jesus died, **God paid a price beyond calculation.** So God kept vigil to be sure that salvation was thoroughly accomplished. Therefore, rest assured that through Christ you are forever safe from death.

- C. **V.42** says that since the LORD kept vigil on that night, Israel was to keep vigil each year on that night in order to honor

the LORD. That was the purpose of the Passover feast. Each time the commemorated the Passover they proclaimed again their faith that the LORD would accept the blood of a lamb as a sacrifice for their sin, saving them from the judgment of death. As Christians we do that when we receive Communion, but also as we daily orient our lives to the God who saved us through Christ Jesus, and when we face death itself. When we die, we do not die like any other people. Because of Jesus, *“to die is gain.”* Death has lost its venom and we need never fear it again.

Illus.: Shortly after I came to VCL a student told me about a play written by the great American playwright, **Eugene O’Neill** called *Lazarus Laughed*. It is about Lazarus’s life after Jesus raised him from the dead. Near the beginning of the play, guests from Bethany are gathering for a banquet in Lazarus’s honor. They are all desperate to hear what Lazarus has to say about his experience. One guest says, *“The whole look of his face has changed. He is like a stranger from a far land. There is no longer any sorrow in his eyes. They must have forgotten sorrow in the grave.”*

Another guest, one who had helped roll the tombstone aside, recalls the scene after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead: *“And then Lazarus knelt and kissed Jesus’ feet and both of them smiled and Jesus blessed him and called him ‘My Brother’ and went away; and Lazarus, looking after Him, began to laugh softly like a man in love with God. Such a laugh I never heard! It made my ears drunk! It was like wine! And though I was half-dead with fright I found myself laughing, too.”* [Act 1, Scene 1]

When the LORD saves you never fear death again.

Illus.: This past week my niece, **Addie Zierman**, was interviewed for an hour on Canada’s National Public Radio. She is a gifted author whose book, *When We Were On Fire*, has gotten her a lot

of attention. She was interviewed about her take on her Christian pilgrimage. The host followed the prearranged questions till the very end. She wrote what happened in her blog.

“Wait,” he says. “Wait. I want to go further here. Like, what about hell?”

I inhale.

“Yeah,” he continues, his voice loud in my right ear. “A guy comes up to you on the street and says. ‘I don’t believe in Jesus. Am I going to hell?’ What do you say?”

In the studio, the clock ticks, ticks, ticks in front of me, and the audio guy yawns behind the glass, and the question feels like an unexpected blow to the side of the head.

“Am I going to hell?”

She was bushwacked. It’s not an honest question. It was a trick question to make her as a Christian appear close-minded and judgmental. It’s a favorite of unbelievers. I thought of this as I studied the last verses of this passage. Listen and then I’ll tell you why: **vv.43-49....**

Remember when Pharaoh had the gall to say in **v.32**, *“And also bless me”*? And remember the *“many other people”* who left Egypt with the Israelites (v.38)? Is there any way Pharaoh *could’ve* been blessed? Were those *“many other people”* saved by God since they left with the Israelites? The hypothetical guy asks, *“Am I going to hell?”* The answer is actually in these rules about the Passover.

III. GOD WILL SAVE AND BLESS ANYONE WHO ENTERS INTO A COVENANT WITH HIM AND WHO TRUSTS THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB (12:43-49)

- A. God told Abraham that the sign of their covenant together was to be circumcision. Circumcision was a personal blood-stained promise that a man and his family belonged to the LORD. In the New Testament physical circumcision is done away with but our hearts still must be given to the Lord if we want to be regarded as his people. So the first answer to the man who defiantly asks, *“Am I going to hell?”* is, *Would you prefer to be included in God’s family*

and his covenant? If you want to, you may by giving the Lord your heart. God would love to have you in his family.

- B. Then there are the commands regarding the eating of the lamb. They were to eat the lamb inside, protected by its blood on their doorposts. No bones were to be broken because this lamb was to be without defect. You'll remember that John makes a point of telling us that none of Jesus' bones were broken when he was crucified. And all the community enters into this feast. **No one would be likely to eat this meal unless they were serious about its meaning. Commemorating that first meal was an act of faith.** It was saying, *"I believe the LORD will protect me, too, as he did my spiritual ancestors, by the sacrificed Lamb."*

"Am I going to hell?" You certainly don't have to but you have to come inside where it is safe. You have to trust the blood of the Lamb, or else you face death defenseless. You can have everlasting life if you want it. But only if you are protected and nourished by the blood of the Lamb. Isn't it wonderful that the LORD has provided a way for you *not* to go to hell?! So you tell me, *are you going to hell?*

Conclusion

Illus.: Addie explained in her blog how she'd been caught off-guard by the question and how she left the radio studio unsettled by her answer. This is how she concluded:

It's Ash Wednesday, and all around the city, people are going to church. Priests are smearing ashen crosses onto one forehead after another that we might be reminded of the fleetingness of life; the inevitability of death. From here, we turn to the season of Lent, in which we turn our eyes to the life and death, the suffering and sacrifice of Christ.

I remember those years spent trying to reach God through a cloud of clinical depression and of my own anger, and I'm still figuring out what we mean when we talk about Capital-H Hell. But I'm desperately grateful for the other hells from

which I've been freed. The ones constructed by myself and by others. The places I've been powerless to escape on my own.

The city skyline disappears behind me, and the sun breaks through the clouds, and I don't know what happens, exactly, when we die. Only that Jesus has made a way.

<http://addiezierman.com/2014/03/06/>