



October 3 & 4, 2015
World Communion Services
Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

The Story: Finding the Scarlet Thread Deliverance

Exodus 1-7; 10-17

This is Bashar al-Assad. He is the president of Syria. Assad's brutal suppression of opposition forces has claimed over 300,000 lives and led to the biggest refugee crisis since WWII. So far, 12 million Syrians (half the population) have fled their homes at great risk for a chance to save their lives. Those who remain cry out at the brutality.

So imagine this: You are out raking and burning leaves when suddenly, a voice speaks to you from the fire. "I have heard the cry of the oppressed people in Syria. I am going to deliver them. So book a flight to Damascus, catch a cab to Assad's palace, and tell him I have sent you to deliver the people from his hand. And take along that rake you are holding; I'm going to do some pretty cool tricks with it." How eager would you be to book that flight?

We continue our journey through God's Story; looking for the big themes and big characters. And, we are watching for the Scarlet Thread: how Jesus is woven into the entire story, from beginning to end. You just read about Joseph, one of twelve sons of Jacob sold into slavery by his brothers but who ended up the second most powerful man in Egypt. So how many have read chapter 3? How many have told part of the story to someone else this week. (That's the point!)

Last week we left the Hebrews in Goshen, in the north of Egypt. There is a saying that "guests and fish both begin to smell after three days." Well the Hebrews overstayed their welcome by about 400 years! Remember, part of God's promise to Abram was they would have a land of their own. Egypt wasn't it! But it was a fertile breeding ground. Twelve sons and their families entered Egypt to escape the famine. 430 years later guess how many Hebrews there were? More than 2 million! Remember God's promise about a nation as numerous as the stars in the sky?

This freaked Pharaoh out. He became afraid of them. So they went from being honored guests to slaves, building Pharaoh's great cities. Still their numbers grew. So in a ghastly decision, Pharaoh ordered every male Hebrew baby to be thrown into the Nile. One couple refused. They put their baby in a basket and hid him among the reeds of the Nile... the last place you'd expect to find a living Hebrew boy. Pharaoh's own daughter discovers the baby and adopts him. She even hires

his birth mother to be his nursemaid! And she named him Moses which means, "Drawn out."

Do you catch any glimpses of the Scarlet Thread? When Moses was born, his people were oppressed by the Egyptians. When Jesus was born, his people were oppressed by the Romans. When Moses was born, Pharaoh ordered all the baby boys to be killed. When Jesus was born, King Herod ordered all the baby boys in Bethlehem to be killed.

Moses grows up in two worlds; he was raised in Pharaoh's court but schooled in the ways of his own people. As a young man, he witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and kills him and buries him in the sand. But he is found out and flees for his life into the wilderness. There he marries, has a family and tends sheep for 40 years... lost and forgotten. (By the way, before Jesus began his ministry, where did he go? The wilderness! How long? 40 days.)

Then comes the burning bush. One day God appears to Moses with terrifying orders: return to the land where you are wanted for murder, and tell Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" Moses was the savior sent by God to free his people. Do you see the thread? "Today, in the house of David, a savior has been born to you, Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11"

You will read how Moses tries to weasel out of God's call with five excuses. "I'm a nobody. I don't really know who you are. No one will believe me. I'm not gifted enough. I don't want to go; send someone else." (Aren't those the same excuses we use when we don't want to speak up for Christ?)

Finally, Moses relents and faces Pharaoh down. But Pharaoh is stubborn, so God sends ten plagues to break his hard heart. The last one does the trick and Pharaoh sends the Hebrews away, but quickly changes his mind. He sends 600 chariots—the Abrams tank of the time—to wipe them out, but God rescues them spectacularly. He divides the sea and lets his people walk through on dry land. Then, when the army follows, the walls of water crash down, killing them all. Pharaoh had thrown Hebrew boys into the Nile; now Egyptian "boys" are swallowed up by the sea!

And for the first time in 430 years, God's people are on their way to the Promised Land. You will read how God provides for their needs, and you will catch more glimpses of the Scarlet Thread. The people become thirsty. Moses strikes a rock and out comes water. And you will remember how Jesus said to the thirsty woman at the well, "I am the Living Water; whoever drinks from me will never thirst again."

You will read how the people become hungry in the wilderness. God provides miraculous bread. Every morning they find the ground covered with it. "What is it?" they ask. Do you know what that phrase sounds like in Hebrew? "Manna!" And you will remember how Jesus was with crowds in the middle of nowhere and they

became hungry. He fed them all miraculously... five loaves, two fish. And later he would say, "I Am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will not hunger."

Are you seeing the pattern? The Old Testament points toward Jesus. The Scarlet Thread is woven through every story but nowhere more vividly than in the last of the ten plagues. God gives Pharaoh many chances: The Nile turns to blood, a plague of frogs, of gnats, of flies... a plague against livestock, a plague of boils, of hail, of locusts and of darkness. But they don't work. Pharaoh's heart is so hard that every time God removes a plague, he recants. Finally the Lord sends one last, terrible plague upon the land.

Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a Passover lamb for his family, one for each household. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.

Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

"...When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.'"

The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron. At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

Here we come to the most vivid glimpse of the Scarlet Thread in the life of Moses: a spotless sacrificial lamb. Its blood painted on the top and sides of the door of every home. As God goes through the land, if he sees the blood of the lamb on the house—did you notice the promise—"...he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down." The Destroyer "passed over" that house. Passover.

You do see Jesus, right? But here's the big difference. Jesus was the lamb to be slaughtered. 1400 years later in Jerusalem, the perfect, Passover Lamb was

slaughtered on a cross. His blood spilled. Yet way back in Exodus 12, we discover the gospel of Jesus: the only way to be saved—the only deliverance from the Destroyer—is if your household is under the blood of the Lamb.

Here we come to the most offensive thing about the gospel. Not what it teaches about abortion or about homosexuality or any other hot button topic. This is what the world finds most offensive about Jesus: salvation is found in no one else. The Egyptians that night might have argued with the Destroyer. “Wait, it’s not fair! We are religious! We are good people! We worship the gods in our own way.” And the Destroyer says, “If you are not covered by the blood of the lamb, you are mine.”

Today, our offended world still cries, “Wait. It’s not fair! We are religious. We are good people. We worship god in our own way.” And the Destroyer still declares, “If you are not covered by the blood of the Lamb, you are mine.” Here is the most important question you must ask yourself—Fathers, particularly, as spiritual leaders in your home—Are you too distracted by the goodies of life, too confused by the lies of our culture, too uncertain about what you believe, too busy, too self-centered to make time to ensure that your family is covered by the saving blood of Christ?

Something crossed my mind this week I had never thought of. It was risky to obey God’s command that night. What if Moses was wrong? What if God didn’t come through? Ever since Moses showed up, things got worse. No straw to make bricks. Nine plagues that only ticked Pharaoh off. What if this tenth plague just made him madder? If Moses is wrong, the Hebrews have just made it easier for Pharaoh’s soldiers to seek revenge. Just look for the house with lamb’s blood on the door. The followers of Yahweh were marked! It took courage to stand for the Lord against the Destroyer. Courage to trust that, in the end, God would deliver. It took courage to be marked for God.

On Thursday a man walked into a Community College in Roseburg, Oregon wearing a flak jacket and carrying several weapons. Before he was done, nine people were dead and others wounded. Most of the murders took place in one classroom. Reportedly, he ordered everyone to stand and then asked each person, one at a time, “Are you a Christian?” If they said “No” or nothing, they were shot in the leg. If they said “Yes,” they were shot in the head.

[Have 9 people stand] How frightening it must have been for that first martyr who declared her faith in Christ at gunpoint... but how much worse for the second, and the third, and the fourth, and the fifth, [etc., have each sit]. It is now clear what your fate will be. Keep your mouth shut, and you will live. Claim the name of Jesus, and you will meet him. What brave souls. Did you wonder, as I did, whether in that moment you would have the courage to offer your life in sacrifice? If someone asked at gunpoint, “Who here stands for Jesus?” would I be brave enough to raise my hand?

Sometime in the mists of eternity past, God the Father asked the question, "Who will stand for my broken world? And Jesus raised his hand and said, "I will. I will lay down my life. I will spill my blood for my beloved children."

That is the meaning of this table. When we come to it, we remember that Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, laid down his life for us. And we declare, in the midst of a hostile world—and in defiance of the Destroyer—"I and my family belong to Jesus Christ." Why does this matter? Because real life is only found in Him. He is the creator; He is the sustainer of life; apart from him is only judgment and death. This is not just ritual. This is a matter of life. Are you—is your family—covered by the life-giving blood of Jesus? If so, I invite you to come.