



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

October-November-December, 2020 • Volume 51, No. 4

The Prophet of the Passover

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

By the time the generation of Joseph and his brothers passed away, *“the children of Israel...multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land [of Egypt] was filled with them”* (Ex. 1:7). Not wanting to lose them as a labor force but not wanting them to increase in power, the Egyptians *“set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens”* (v. 11). However, despite life being hard for the Israelites, they continued to multiply to the point that Pharaoh instructed all newborn males to be killed (vv. 12-22).

It is in this context that Moses was born to parents of the tribe of Levi, who—*“by faith”* and *“not afraid of the king’s command”*—hid him for three months (Heb. 11:23). Then he was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter with his own mother serving as nursemaid (Ex. 2:1-10). No wonder then that Moses, despite being *“learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians”* (Ac. 7:22), had such an affinity for his Hebrew brethren when he *“looked at their burdens”* (Ex. 2:11) that he came to their defense. This he did by faith, *“choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin”* (Heb. 11:24,25).

As Stephen noted, Moses *“supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand”* (Ac. 7:25). So Moses fled into the wilderness of Midian and worked as a shepherd there for forty years (v. 30) before God called Him to return to Egypt to appear before Pharaoh *“that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt”* (Ex. 3:10).

The parallels between Moses and Jesus are obvious. From events surrounding their births (fearful king killing innocent baby boys) to coming to deliver others from bondage to being rejected, Moses

pointed to Jesus. Years later, Moses told the children of Israel that one day God would *“raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear”* (Deut. 18:15).

Stephen, in his own defense before an angry Jewish council, established Israel’s pattern of rejecting God’s prophets, citing the rejections of both Joseph and Moses by the Jewish forefathers (Ac. 7:9-36). Speaking of Moses, Stephen said, *“whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt”* (7:39). This history he reviewed as evidence that the Jews’ rejection, betrayal, and murder of the Messiah was just more of the same (vv. 51-53). *“Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy... of how much worse punishment...will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the spirit of grace?”* (Heb. 10:28,29).

Moses was to secure the deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt through a series of plagues by which Egypt would be humbled, God would be glorified, and the so-called gods of the Egyptians shown to be impotent (Ex. 3:20; 7:3-5; 12:12).

Most of the ten plagues could have been seen as direct attacks on objects of Egyptian worship. After nine plagues, God told Moses, *“I will bring yet one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether”* (11:1). Moses predicted to Pharaoh that *“all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die”* (v. 5). Then Moses *“went out from Pharaoh in great anger”* (v. 8). But God told Moses, *“Pharaoh will not heed you, so that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt”* (v. 9). Yet, this would be the event that would secure the deliverance of Israel from bondage.

God told Moses to instruct the children of Israel about what He was going to do and how to prepare for the event. In view of their coming deliverance, the current month would be the first month of Israel’s calendar (12:1). On the tenth day of the month, each household was to select a lamb (v. 2) *“without blemish, a male of the first year”* (v. 5). It was to be kept until the fourteenth day and then killed at twilight with its blood being applied to the doorposts and lintel of the house in which the lamb was to be eaten (vv. 6,7). The meal was to be eaten quickly as they prepared for travel and was called, *“The LORD’s Passover”* (v. 11).

The significance of this terminology pertained to the judgment coming upon Egypt from which Israel would be spared. *“For I will pass through the land of Egypt... and will strike all the firstborn...both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment. I am the LORD”* (v. 12). The blood would be the sign that would *“make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel”* (11:7). God said, *“When I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt”* (12:13).

Moses assured the people that God would *“not allow the destroyer to come into [their] houses”* (v. 23). On the mid-night following the fourteenth day of the month, God struck all the firstborn in Egypt. Pharaoh rose in the night, called for Moses with the message, *“go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go serve the LORD as you have said”* (vv. 29-31). The blood of an unblemished lamb saved believers from the wrath of God and secured their freedom from bondage. They were to remember this for generations to come (vv. 24-27). So should we!

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BEYOND ALL DOUBT

By NOAH DIESTELKAMP

Satan has many tools with which he tries to tempt us. One of his most often used tools is doubt. It was with doubt that he first tempted Adam and Eve—"Did God *actually* say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1, ESV, emphasis mine)—and Satan has continued to tempt humanity toward doubt ever since. We all face doubts of some kind, but it is particularly damaging when we begin to doubt ourselves ("Will I ever be good enough?"), doubt God ("Does God *really* love me?"), and doubt our relationship with Him ("How could God use me in His kingdom?"). Knowing that we would face doubt, God preserved for us a history of His relationship with mankind—a history that we can examine to help us overcome and move beyond doubt. We will look at three of these relationships: Adam and Eve, Noah, and Abraham.

From the beginning, God *created the world perfect* (Gen. 1:31) and mankind innocent and pure (Gen. 2:25). God had a *special relationship* with Adam and Eve (e.g. walking in the garden, Gen. 3:8), allowing mankind to live in His presence. Furthermore, God *gave mankind instructions* which they were to follow (Gen. 2:15-17). Despite God's abundant provision for them, Adam and Eve chose to be led to sin by the Serpent and, in so doing, broke their special relationship with God. As a result, God caused them to leave His presence and pronounced curses on them (Gen. 3:16-19), but He did not leave them without hope. He also cursed the Serpent (Gen. 3:14-15), promising humanity that the offspring of woman—the Son of Man—would someday crush the Serpent.

By the time of Noah, we see that the world was *full of wickedness* (Gen. 6:5-6). God called Noah out of the sinful world, initiated a *special covenant relationship* with him, and *gave him instructions* which Noah was expected to follow (Gen. 6:13-18). We see in Genesis 6:22 that Noah "did all that God commanded him" (ESV). Noah was righteous and blameless (Gen. 6:9), and his obedience led to the preservation of humanity. It was not Noah's righteousness that saved him, however; it was God's faithfulness to His promises. In preserving humanity, God remained faithful to His promise to crush the Serpent's head.

In the time of Abraham, we see that the world was *still contaminated by sin* (e.g. Gen. 19). God called Abraham out from his homeland and initiated a *special covenant relationship* with him, *giving him instructions* and expectations that go

with the covenant (12:1-3; 17:10-14). On inspection of Abraham's walk with God, we see multiple times when Abraham fumbled his faith and doubted God. Twice, Abraham doubted God's ability to protect him and lied to powerful leaders about Sarah's identity (Gen. 12:10-20; 20). Despite Abraham's doubt, God was faithful to protect him! In Genesis 15, Abraham expressed doubt that God would make him a great nation as he and Sarah were still childless. God's response to Abraham's doubt was to renew His promise to Abraham, assuring him that He would be faithful to His promises. Abraham's doubt did not stop God from being faithful to His special covenant relationship with him.

These relationships illustrate three important characteristics of God: 1) God created the world the way He wants it to be—mankind living in the presence of God, 2) Since the fall of man, God has been working steadily towards redeeming man into His presence, and 3) God delivers on His promises. God promised to make a nation of Abraham, and He delivered on His promise! God promised to save Noah from the flood, and He (quite literally) delivered on His promise! God promised humanity that He would crush the Serpent, and He delivered on His promise in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ! In the same way, God also established a new covenant that is available to all mankind even to this day! The ongoing context for this covenant should be noted. We live in a *world full of wickedness*. Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 actions of immorality common today that do not belong to the kingdom of God. God has called us from this sin-filled world, as Paul expresses in verse 11, "Such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (ESV). God has called us to a *special covenant relationship* with Him and has *left instructions* for us in His Word with the expectation that we will follow them.

God's new covenant has the same characteristics as God's covenants with Abraham and Noah, and this covenant relationship is the reason we can overcome and

grow beyond doubt! In establishing the new covenant through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, God publicly and unequivocally displayed that victory over the Serpent had been His all along. He was faithful to His promise! Like Abraham, we fumble our faith and are not perfect in holding up our end of the covenant, but God still supplies protection and is ready and willing to renew His covenant with us! God's faithfulness and mercy means that in a covenant relationship with Christ, we are assured victory over the Serpent and the doubts he plants in our hearts. Doubts will arise, but through Christ we can overcome them. Doubt cannot stand long in the presence of a special covenant relationship with Christ! "Will I ever be good enough?" No, but God's promises are not dependent on our perfection. They never have been! "Does God *really* love me?" Yes. God was willing to sacrifice the blood of His Son in order to establish a covenant with me in order to bring me back into His presence! "How could God use me in His kingdom?" God has a long track record of working in and through flawed people, and we are not exceptions.

This is the covenant of which we have the opportunity to be a part! By it, we can live confident of our victory in Christ because God is and always has been faithful to His promises. Overcoming doubt requires us to stop believing in ourselves and begin believing in Christ. Every day, we can confront our doubts with the truth of God's provision for His covenant people. "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" (Lam. 3:22-23, ESV). "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39, ESV). God's love is capable of getting us beyond doubt because God's love is indeed beyond doubt. Praise God!

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Being of Value in the Lord's Work

Things not needed:

- Eloquence of speech (1 Cor. 2:1-4)
- Much secular education (Ac. 4:13)
- Wealth (Matt. 8:20)
- Good health (2 Cor. 12:10)
- Years of experience

Things needed:

- Sacrificial living (Rom. 12:1-2)
- Diligence in study (2 Tim. 2:15)
- Generosity (2 Cor. 9:6-7)
- Love of lost souls (Rom. 10:1-3)
- A good example

God is The Standard

By RICK LIGGIN

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called the children of God; and such we are” (1 Jn. 3:1)! Wow! The fact that God calls us His children is a really big deal! It forces us to see how much God the Father loves us. But it’s more than just that God “calls” us His children. Our text affirms “and such we are”—we actually *are* the children of God—and this just amplifies even more how much God loves us! Again, all I know to say about that is, “Wow!”

But our text goes on to say, “Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (3:2). All we know about our future existence with God in eternity is that in some way “we will be like Him.” And that, too, is an amazing thought...an amazing thought that ought to impact the way we live our lives now on earth. Our text essentially makes this point, “And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, *just as He is pure*” (3:3). If our hope truly is set on being with God and being like God in eternity, then we will be people who consistently and constantly sweep sin out of our lives; we will be people who work hard at being pure and staying pure just as our Father is pure.

These facts rightly considered move us closer to the point of this article, because the next thing we read in our text is, “And everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness” (3:4). The original word translated “lawlessness” here literally means to behave or act “without law.” And so, according to our text, sin is an action that is “against” or “outside” of the law (3:4).

Now it is important to note that this verse tells us what sin is in a practical sense, but it does not strictly give us a definition of the original word for “sin.” In the original language of the New Testament, the word “sin” literally means “to miss the mark.” It’s as if we are aiming at some “mark” or “target,” but we miss the “mark” or fall short of our “target.” Now, if the word “sin” means “to miss the mark,” then we can’t help but ask, “What is the mark (target) that we miss?” And right here is where it really gets interesting to me!

The Roman letter tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). So what is the “mark” we have missed or the “target” we have fallen short of when we sin? This text makes it clear that the mark or target is “the glory of God”! What we are supposed to be

aiming at is the glory of God. When we sin, we miss or fall short of that mark! If “sin” in a practical sense “is lawlessness,” then the law of God is not simply a list of arbitrary or capricious rules, a burden to be borne. Rather, God’s law is a reflection of His glory. If sin is “lawlessness” that falls short of the glory of God, then the law must somehow reflect and express the glory of God! And so, in refusing sin and choosing rather to practice righteousness, one chooses to reflect the image of God! What this says is that God Himself is the standard of what is right and lawful. God

says, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16). In a similar way, His Son teaches us, “You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). And the apostle Paul urges us to “be imitators of God, as beloved children.” God Himself is the standard! Sin is everything that God is not; and to reach out for sin is to assault the nature of God and to assault God Himself.

And so, if our hope is actually “fixed” on God—if we truly hope to see Him as He is and be like Him—then most certainly we will keep on sweeping sin out of our lives; we will purify ourselves “just as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3). Is it truly your hope to see Him as is and to be like Him?

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‘ESSENTIAL’ By AL DIESTELKAMP

Words have meanings! Ever since the emergence of the coronavirus epidemic, we’ve been hearing the word *essential* used frequently by politicians, scientists, reporters, and neighbors. It’s a good word, but the way it is being used during this crisis leads me to borrow a memorable line from a once-popular movie: “You keep using that word; I do not think it means what you think it means” [*The Princess Bride*].

I was pretty sure I knew the meaning of the word *essential* before I looked it up in the dictionary, but I wanted to be sure. The definition includes words like *absolute*, “*necessary*, *indispensable*, and *required*.” Since my dictionary is over sixty years old, I googled the word just to make sure I hadn’t missed a change in its meaning over the years. *The New Oxford American Dictionary* defined the word as an adjective meaning “absolutely necessary; extremely important,” or as a noun referring to “a thing that is absolutely necessary.”

Some of the recent governmental mandates declaring certain businesses or individuals as “essential,” (and by implication declaring all others “non-essential”) would be laughable if they weren’t so sad. The question that remains unanswered is, “deemed to be essential and non-essential to whom, and by whom?”

We all recognize that some essentials can and should be suspended under unusual circumstances, but they must not be suspended indefinitely. Food is essential to life but even our Lord fasted forty days and nights before enduring intense temptation from the devil (Matt. 4:1-2). The apostle Paul’s instructions to husbands and wives clearly imply that sexual intimacy is essential in a healthy marriage, but the apostle Paul indicated that it was permissible to consensually forego it “for a time,” only to “come together again” to avoid temptation (1 Cor. 7:4-5).

It should not surprise us that many of the “powers that be,” and even much of the world place assembled worship in the “unessential” category. All of our lives we’ve heard people say, “I can worship God by myself—I don’t have to go to church.” While private worship is good and should be encouraged, it is never a substitute for assembled worship.

There is a good reason given by the Word of God for assembling with other Christians. We often quote Hebrews 10:25 to prove this point without reading the verse right before it which reveals a God-given reason for assembling together—that being to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.” While an online meeting may be a temporary measure under unusual circumstances, it is a poor substitute at best and does not fulfill the essential practice of coming together as a church in one place (1 Cor. 11:18,20).

Readers may mistakenly think that I am being critical of decisions to suspend in-person worship assemblies during the height of the coronavirus shutdown. Such is not the case. What I am concerned about is a willingness to be satisfied with accepting the claim that in-person assemblies are not essential and to be comfortable with so-called “virtual assemblies” (an oxymoron). The essentiality of in-person assembling demands that we find a way to make any suspension of such very temporary.

Many religious leaders also have a problem with the word *essential*. They agree that water baptism is important, but deny that it’s essential to salvation. However, Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5), and confirmed it in the parting commission to His apostles (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16); and His apostles clearly understood the essentiality of baptism as seen in their response to the question “What shall we do?” (Ac. 2:37,38).

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Printing & supplies	\$ 345.00
Postage	356.41
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 701.41
Funds available for past issue	1,038.83
Surplus	\$ 337.42

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We want to thank each one of our voluntary partners. With their donations we are assured of sufficient funds to continue this paper through at least most of next year. This issue is expected to cost about \$720 which should leave a surplus of about \$2,327 available for future issues.

"Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing"

~1 Thessalonians 6:11

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Philippians 4:8

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*Published quarterly by the Diestelkamp family in the interest of purity of doctrine and practice.
Distributed free in quantities and as ability permits.*

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Cortland, IL 60112

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When The Local Church Feels Unnecessary

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

What if we, way in the back of our minds, have kind of liked not assembling with the church during the pandemic? Maybe it's just the slower pace of Sunday mornings, or more family time, or just the freshness of change of on-line studies. Maybe there's a slight disappointment when church assemblies start again, a feeling of not being ready yet. We have missed the people, but not the worship or the sermons or the work or the serving. Or maybe we haven't missed each other all that much and Zoom meetings feel good enough. An uncomfortable thought pops up: The local church feels unnecessary.

It's about God. Serving God can easily slip into serving in a way that respects our likes and preferences over His. We have to remind ourselves that assemblies are about God and His will, not "me" and "my" will.

God knows that when we're together it is a great time to "stir up love and good works..." and to exhort one another (He 10:25). Assemblies are a great time to remember our Lord in the Lord's supper (1 Co 11:17-34). Assemblies are a great time to focus on the text of Scripture (Co 4:16), to pray and sing. Assemblies can even be

an opportunity for spiritual warnings, discipline to remove evil influences and to save the erring (1 Co 5:4-5).

Some may suggest that what they've done at home has even been more helpful and meaningful, more intimate than what is done in a church assembly. God says there is value in assembling and so we will make it about Him by assembling. However, if assemblies are not edifying, we need to be present to help make them edifying. The Corinthians were not told to stay home because their assemblies were chaotic (1 Co 14:26) and divisive (1 Co 11:18-19). Our positive experiences at home during the pandemic can teach us what we should have been doing at home all along, and we can also bring what we learned to make assemblies more edifying.

It's about others. Most discovered that, with a little creativity (like home delivery), we could be self-sufficient during the pandemic (of course, not really since we all depend on supply chains). Maybe we will be tempted to feel this spiritually—that we don't need one another.

A lot of "one another" things happen when the church assembles. Others need you to stir them up, edify and exhort them, and set an example for them. Although the

relationships, forbearing, submission, and cooperation that assemblies require can be challenging, local church assemblies give us opportunities to express our love in all these things!

It's about me. We are often not the best judges of our own spiritual needs. We may need the stirring up and exhortation of an assembly (He 10:24-25) without realizing it. A group brings a wealth of knowledge, wisdom, and experience to worship and studies. Assembling gives us an opportunity to have fellowship, to literally not be alone in serving the Lord. The Lord values this and so we value it too.

I heard a brother recently lament that "Satan is sifting us" with this pandemic. It's an allusion to Satan's request to test Simon Peter in Luke 2:31. Assembling with local churches at this time may be a test of Satan. We may find assemblies to be awkward, non-traditional, uncomfortable, distracting, less connective, and maybe less edifying than in the past. Giving up on assembling isn't the answer. The Lord has made assembling with the church important. Now it is up to us to make it equally important to ourselves.

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