

THE ORDINANCE OF THE PASSOVER: THE PURCHASE

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, [both] of man and of beast: it is mine . . . And it shall be when the Lord shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he sware unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, That thou shalt set apart unto the Lord all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males [shall be] the Lord's. And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come saying, What [is] this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix, being males, but all the firstborn of my children I redeem. And it shall be for a token upon thine hand and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt. (Exodus 13:1-2, 11-16)

The death of the firstborn male in Egypt, together with the Passover lamb, signifies the great doctrines of New Covenant Redemption, Imputation, Substitution, Propitiation, and Justification. Its legal foundation is laid out in II Corinthians 5:14-15:

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

If the guilt of one person may be transferred to another, and the substitute has paid the penalty, then the guilty party is free. If the penalty is death, then the death of the substitute is accounted to the culprit. Furthermore, if the substitute dies for more than one, all for whom he died are counted executed, and the law has no claim against them. This is the heart of the gospel, and it is properly the focal point of the Hebrews' deliverance from Egypt.

Egypt, as a type of the world, was under the sentence of death because of sin. Since each and every Israelite were sinners as well as the Egyptians, they were included in this death sentence. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." All in Egypt must die, and all will certainly die. They may die literally, or they may die in the person of a substitute. Since final judgment against this evil world is deferred until the end of time, God took the firstborn male of every Egyptian family as a token judgment upon the whole family. But He put a difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites, permitting (and commanding) them to offer a lamb as a substitute for their child and, consequently, the whole family. The display of that lamb's blood on the lintels and doorposts of a house exempted that house from God's righteous judgment.

This was called "The Lord's Passover," not Israel's Passover. It is God who must first be vindicated. Sovereignty, Righteousness, and Justice must first be satisfied. With propitiation of divine prerogative, and justice established, man may then lay hold on the fruits of that propitiation. Christ is God's Lamb, not the world's. As God's Lamb, He offers His merits to all. Confessed, repentant sinners may find they have an interest in the Saviour's blood, and Christ becomes *their* Passover; for Christ, in His death, not only established the righteousness of God and secured Divine dignity, but also purchased a particular people out of all Adam's ruined race.

The Delivered Designated

Those whom Christ purchased must be delivered. Our text unequivocally designates God's delivered. They are said to be the firstborn of Israel. "All the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem," and "all the firstborn of my children I redeem."

The promises of redemption were not given to Adam and his seed. After the Fall, God promised to send a "Seed of Woman" who should "bruise the serpent's head," but He gave no promise of the fruits of that triumph to Adam or his posterity. The promise to be the heir of God was given to another man, Abraham, called out of pagan idolatry and separated from the rest of his family. This man had two sons, from both of whom sprang great nations. But the Abrahamic promise did not succeed to Ishmael, but to Isaac. When Isaac's wife conceived twins, the two babes began to strive with one another while yet in her womb. Only one, Jacob, was to be the heir of promise (born after the Spirit); the other, Esau, was a profane man of the flesh.

Jacob's name (the Supplanter) was changed to Israel (Prince with God). He fathered twelve sons. Each of these twelve sons with their descendants met the outward requirement to be included in God's special redeemed people. They were of "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Outwardly they were Israel, God's chosen. But Romans 2:29 tells us that not even all of natural Israel is true Spiritual Israel: "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, [and] not in the letter; whose praise [is] not of men, but of God."

All Israel is to be redeemed (Romans 11:26). This agrees with Christ's words in John 6:37: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out;" and also with the Apostle's exultation in Romans 8:30: "Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." None of God's elect people shall fail to be called, shall fail to respond to that call, or shall fail to persevere to the end. They shall not perish.

Now this is a hard doctrine for some who imagine man's alleged free will is being violated. They reason, contrary to Romans 3:11 (there is none that seeketh after God), that some really want to be saved but are shut out because they were not chosen. Election closes the gate on no one. It is not a "shut-out door" but an "access door." It only opens and provides deliverance where *none* existed before. Part of man's confusion and outrage at these doctrines can be laid at the feet of men trying to think in terms for which they are not enabled. God's thoughts and ways are not ours. In the Eternal, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Sovereign God, there are *no* possibilities, only certainties. For mortal, foolish, finite, weak, limited man, there are *no* certainties, only possibilities. Our text provides one of those wonderful passages in God's Word where we are invited to survey redemption both from God's side and man's side.

From God's side redemption is certain. It is applied to a particular people; and all of them shall, without fail, be saved. Salvation is *mandatory*. "All the firstborn of thy children shalt thou redeem." Man and beast alike all belong to God. He will not be robbed. The beast is sacrificed . . . rendered up to God in death. Men (only children of Israel considered here) are to be redeemed with a substitute that they may be a *living* sacrifice (Romans 12:1), their only reasonable service. Viewed thusly from God's side, only the elect are contemplated.

From man's side redemption is a possibility. We have no way of knowing who are the elect, or who are not. We are obliged, therefore, if we would be wise unto salvation, to make our calling and election sure. As in the firstling of an ass, our redemption is *not* mandated: it is only a possibility. All men, irrespective of their being elect or non-elect, are thus properly contemplated. If we would be redeemed, a proper lamb must be offered in our place. If not, then we must be damned. God will not have the sacrifice of an ass.

The Delivered Defined

The Scriptures take up various metaphors to typify the elect and non-elect: sheep and goats, wheat and tares, wise and foolish virgins. Questions often arise. Do goats become sheep, tares become wheat, foolish virgins become wise? How do we consider men in general? Sheep or goats? Do we assume they are all elect unless they prove otherwise? Have we any warrant to tell them that Christ died in their place?

We shall see that from man's point of view each and every member of Adam's fallen race is to be contemplated neither as a sheep or a goat but as an ass! Irrespective of parentage, baptism, or church membership, our natural children cannot be considered Covenant children evangelically. They can only be viewed as the firstling of an ass. Their redemption is possible, but not certain. One of two possibilities *is* certain. They must be redeemed or ruined, delivered or damned, bought or burned. Their birth mandates one or the other.

Now we readily grant that being typified by such a lowly and ignominious beast as an ass might render a fearful blow to the self esteem of some. But however humiliating the prospect, we shall see that the creature is indeed every bit as eminently suited to portray natural man as the sheep is to picture the elect.

We note, first of all, that the ass is classified as an "unclean" beast. Neither parting at the hoof nor chewing the cud, he is doubly judged unfit for human food. Like the evil works of the flesh catalogued in Gal. 5:19-21, his flesh will nourish no life. Banished from the table of man, he is no better suited for the table of the Lord. God's altar must not be defiled with his blood or his flesh. There is nothing about his unclean body that can please God.

In fact, he cannot even approach God in worship. Abraham could bring his beast of burden only until Mt. Moriah could be seen afar off (Genesis 22:5). There the ass must be left. This wretched creature could come no closer. He is counted of those aliens and strangers who, having no hope and without God, are afar off (Eph. 2:12-13).

He is unfit for the Holy City. Wicked King Jehoiakim, who had no heart for the word of God, was "buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. 22:18-19). Such is the expectation of natural man. He has no part or place in the New Jerusalem, but shall be dragged off and cast into a devil's hell.

The ass is universally synonymous with a fool. A person or action considered incredibly stupid, senseless, or silly is called asinine. So also speaks the Scriptures: "For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12). It is true that man increases in worldly sophistry. He continues to amass information and knowledge of natural phenomena. He abounds in technical skills. But as far as spiritual intelligence is concerned, he remains less than an idiot. The wisdom of God, none of the princes of this world know (I Cor. 2:7-8). "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . neither can he know [them]" (I Cor. 2:14). "There is none that understandeth" (Rom 3:11). "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18).

The ass is stubborn and obstinate. "Stubborn as a Missouri mule," the saying goes. Actually, a Missouri mule is no more stubborn than any other, for every mule has a jackass for his father. He may be short on intelligence, but he knows what he likes and does not like. Hitch him to a plow or cart, and if he has a mind not to work, you may curse and beat him until you are exhausted, yet he will not budge. What he lacks in brains, he makes up in will.

Calvinism is often charged with robbing a man of his will, or at least, his freedom of choice. The very opposite is true. Far from minimizing the importance of man's will, Sovereign Grace asserts that it is man's strong, obstinate will that is at the root of his hopelessness. "You *will not* come unto me that you might have life" (John 5:40). It is not from lack of resolve that the drunkard will not leave his bottle, the whoremonger his vice, the liar his deceit, or the glutton his table. They have plenty of resolve to continue sinning. The rebel and the outlaw are stubbornly determined that they *will not* bow the knee to Christ.

The ass has only one value or function in this world. He is a beast of burden. He is put in bondage to hard labor all his life. He is saddled, harnessed, hitched, to be ridden, to be laden, and to struggle under the commercial demands of a greedy and selfish world. Jacob put it well in his prophecy: "Issachar [is] a strong ass couching down between two burdens: And he saw that rest [was] good, and the land that [it was] pleasant, and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute" (Genesis 49:14). So it is with natural man. He is a slave to his lusts, his needs, and his desires. And they are never satisfied. The fear of man and fear of death make him a slave to the devil all his life (Hebrews 2:15). He will never find rest until a Lamb offered in his place sets him free.

One sphere of work, however, is denied the ass. He may not be yoked with an ox (Deut. 22:10). The ox, as a clean beast, typifies the believer who is forbidden to enter into any common effort with an unbeliever (II Cor. 6:14). The Christian's works are righteous, arising from faith and obedience to God. The unbeliever's works are wicked, arising from rebellion and disobedience. The Christian's labors are joy, peace, and liberty in the Spirit; the unbeliever's are sorrow, anxiety, and bondage in the flesh. One is rest, the other strife. There can be no harmony between the two.

There is an interesting variation of this appropriate type of unregenerate man. Abraham's firstborn son, Ishmael, is prophesied to be a "wild ass." *Pere*, translated "wild man" in Genesis 16:12, is correctly translated in all seven other places it occurs as "wild ass." Heretofore we have considered natural man, conformed to this world and ruled by its principles, as typified by the domesticated donkey. But there is a species of men who are so religious that they will not be ruled by the laws and principles of the world . . . who consider themselves above human government. This would be quite well if these devotees were under the government of Christ. Such government that our Saviour exercises over His redeemed more than satisfies laws for reasonable behaviour in human society.

But these Ishmaels' allegiance is not to Christ, but to their own fanatical superstitions. Their behaviour corresponds to that of a wild ass. They will neither be conformed to the world nor yoked with Christ. They will be hitched to no man's wagon, their hands against every man and every man's hand against them. Always fighting, never at peace. The world's efforts to bring peace, to negotiate and strike treaties with these wild asses will forever be met with disappointment and frustration. They will *not* be folded nor stalled.

Not all Ishmaels are of the Mid-Eastern variety. There is that foot-loose and fancy-free "Christian" who belongs to the "Universal Church" made up of all Christians everywhere, but who cannot find any Christians anywhere suitable for him to fellowship with. He refuses to commit himself to a local communion. An active love of the brethren is conspicuously missing. An unwillingness to submit to, or serve and care for, a communion of blood-bought saints strongly denies any real love for the Redeemer. There is no substitutionary lamb for the *wild* ass. He has despised and refused his Owner's fold. He shall have no interest in His redemption.

The Designated Delivered

And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them. Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring [him]. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say that the Lord hath need of him; and

straightway he will send him hither. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loosed him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them. What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed [them] in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed [is] he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed [be] the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. (Mark 11:1-10)

This remarkable account of the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy affords us, not only a beautiful picture of God's gracious deliverance, but the purpose of such deliverance, as well as the means of grace. The ass still typifies natural man in his unregenerate state.

We notice, first of all, that this ass colt is tied. He is not free, as man supposes himself to be in his vigorous assertions of free will. Fettered at his head and neck, he is indeed free to look this way and that. He may spy a luscious clump of green grass over there or a comely female ass colt frolicking over here. He may even make an emotion-charged decision to eat the grass or romp with the jenny. He may even head out in that direction. But he can go no further than the length of his tether, and then he is pulled up short.

Even so, unregenerate man is free to make all sorts of noble decisions, engage in high and admirable intentions and attempts; but nature's evil chain will not permit him to carry them through. When he would do good, evil is not only present but dominant, reminding him that he is captive to his own lusts. Nor has he any power to break his leash. Grieve and mourn over sin as he may, he can no more release himself from its bondage than the ass's tugging and jerking can gain him one more inch of freedom than his captor has given him.

Christ sends for the ass. This is the effectual Cause of his freedom. He is not out seeking Christ. There is nothing in natural man to motivate him to seek the Lord. He would not know where to look, and certainly have no way of recognizing Him if he should come upon Him. As Mary at the empty tomb and the disciples on the road to Emmaus, one may be face to face with the Lord and not know Him. He is the self-disclosing Christ, revealing Himself to whom He will. And he is found of them who sought Him not.

The ass is at a crossroads "where two ways met" when Christ sends for him. There lies the whole of fallen humanity in the valley of decision. God has set before us blessing and cursing, life and death. Two gates offer their portals: the broad way to destruction and the narrow one to life. One way leads to hell, the other way to life . . . under Christ. We must, and will, choose one or the other. Natural ability is not the issue here. Man may not have within him the desire or ability to follow Christ, but he *must choose to submit and obey*. None come to Him who do not. Salvation is not *of* him that wills or him that runs, but never *apart* from such choice and effort. In the final analysis we must choose the good and reject the evil, cleave to Christ and leave all else behind.

Christ delivers the ass from his past owners. It should seem odd to us that those who had the ass in charge would release him with no more protest than, "What are you doing?" Owners of valuable and profitable possessions do not easily give up that to which they have lawful claim. Yet these men, when told that the Lord has use for this beast, readily release him. Even so, the impossible bonds that hold us fast to sin and ruin lose all their power when Christ commands us to be freed. Sin shall have no more dominion over us, for grace now reigns. What law could not do, being weak through sinful flesh, Christ now accomplishes in one mighty stroke of grace. The Lord's death not only satisfied God's judicial wrath for our sin, but robbed the devil of his claim on us. He who refused to let his captives go free is now obliged to loose his grip and retreat into the shadows in the face of "The Lord hath need of him." We must serve him no longer.

The gospel and the Spirit are the two servants the Lord sends to fetch us. Through them we have heard His effectual call. The Spirit, who through regeneration first caused our heart to fear and see ourselves afar off, now cries "Abba, Father" in our hearts and draws us near to God.

The ass is now free. Those whom he has known all his life only as masters now have no power, authority, or government over him. If we subscribed to what many assert to be Christian liberty, then we should expect the little beast to be given an affectionate slap on the rump with an indulgent, "Run along; have a good time: and do whatever your flesh desires."

But that is not the case at all. This donkey has been freed from one slavery to be employed in another. He is not left in a dominion vacuum. Law and government have not been excised from his life. He has been freed from past owners to serve Christ.

So it is with us who have been delivered from the power of darkness to be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). God forbid that grace should require less than law. Both proceed from the same thrice-holy God and bear the stamp of divine perfection, the only difference being that grace reaches the inner man while law only constrains the outer. Does law prohibit murder? Then grace enjoins good will and love from the heart. Does law prohibit adultery? Then grace binds us to purity of gaze and mind. Does law prohibit nudity? Then, much more, grace requires our dress to be modest, unpretentious, and unprovocative. Does law require the tithe of all? Then grace will not permit he who has prospered to be content with mere ten-percent giving.

Though far more exacting is our slavery under Christ, it is not, however, bondage to us, but liberty. Bondage is constraint to do that which we would not. Liberty is freedom to do all that we would in harmony with our true nature. Therefore we count ourselves free, for the inner man has been made to be in perfect harmony with Christ's requirement. And we serve Him joyfully. We would have no other life.

One more aspect of the lovely allegory deserves our attention. We are told that the colt has never been ridden before. Christ is the first to sit upon him. Such beasts as oxen, horses, asses, and mules do not readily accept a man straddling their backs. They must first be "broken" to such service. Likewise, we are all natural rebels, independent, self-willed, and determined not to have another's will imposed upon us. We are never *really cured* of that rebellion outside of Christ. Christ is the only Man who can, in righteousness and peace, "sit upon us." And He accomplishes this immediately. "And they brought the colt to Jesus . . . and he sat upon him." There He, our worthy Christ and Lord, is *seated*. As a king on a throne, He conquers and rides every rebellious, unbroken ass brought to Him.

Consider now this glorious prophecy of Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he [is] just, and having salvation: lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Shout! and sing O Zion, the church of the living God. Here comes your King! What sort of King is He? He is just, righteous, and lowly. Would you find rest, you who are weary and heavy laden? Take His yoke upon you and learn of Him: for He is meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls (Matt. 11:28-29). How proud Israel stumbled over this stumbling stone! They expected a mighty earthly sovereign, riding a white stallion with a royal entourage with splendor and pomp enough to shame the Caesars.

Proud and haughty religionists still stumble over this Christ. They expect salvation to be at no other hand than that of the mighty, the strong, the noble, wise, and polished. They look for a regent on a splendid thoroughbred. Established Christendom, more and more, demands that the ministry meet the approval of intellectual and social snobbery. Many be the religious offerings that come that way, but *they have no salvation*. He who has salvation is the meek and lowly Christ. How does Christ come to us? Now hear this: He is vehicled by a *preacher*. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). What shall we say of this preacher who vehicles the Christ who has salvation? Why, he is nothing more than the firstborn of an ass, whose neck has not been broken solely because a Worthy and Innocent Lamb has died in his place. Now that is something worth braying about!

- C. M.