

## The Object of Faith

*By Faith: Pt. 11*

Today we bring to a close our summer series on the nature of faith. This is our 11<sup>th</sup> message in the series – at first I thought, well we ought to do 12, that’s kind of a prominent biblical number. But actually, 11 is perfect, because all of our teachings in this series have come from one chapter of one book in the New Testament, the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Hebrews. It is the quintessential chapter on faith in all the Bible. And we’ve seen case study after case study of men and women who by faith were able to grow into world changing individuals. They are examples and templates for all of us.

Today we are going to revisit some ground from last week – the story of Moses. I’m going to read you three verses **Hebrews 11:27–29**, but we will especially focus on verse 28. *“By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. 29 By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.*

“By faith [Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.” Now this is a story in outline. It’s amazing. It’s very convicting for a minister or a person who does a lot of public speaking of how you can put a whole story in a very, very small amount of time and a very small, compact space. I mean, it’s going to take me 40 minutes to unpack those three sentences!

The whole story of Moses and the leading out - the exodus - of the people of Israel out of Egypt and out of their slavery is all told here in just a couple of phrases. And if we use the outline of the phrases, we can get an overview and remind ourselves of the account itself, of what happened, of what the event was that’s being talked about here.

Notice, first of all, it says God sent “*the destroyer of the firstborn*”. Now what was that about? You see, between 3,000 and 4,000 years ago, the Israelites - the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - had settled in Egypt but had grown to be such a great people, had grown to be so strong numerically and in many other ways as well, that the pharaoh - the leader of the Egyptians - feared them and decided to oppress them – make life hard for them.

And so he conscripted them into slavery, took away their freedoms and rights and privileges of the rest of the country, and in some cases engaged in some systematic efforts to kill them. Here's a royal edict recorded in **Exodus 1:22**, "*Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."*" An attempt at population control. Just the worst violations of human dignity. And because God was with His people, these things didn't work, but there was regular, intentional, deliberate oppression and violence visited on the Israelites.

Finally, one day God comes to Moses and says, "Go to Pharaoh. I have a message for the king." And you read it in **Exodus 4:22-23**, "*Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: **Israel is my firstborn son**, and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me..."*" Now what is God doing? God is such a creative communicator. What He's doing is showing Pharaoh his true situation.

In those days, the custom was *all* of the wealth, all of the inheritance of a family, would go to the firstborn son. That was the only way they felt they could keep their family's wealth intact. If there were 17 children, it all went to the first son, and that son then took care of the family and kept the family's position in society.

And as a result, the parents doted on the firstborn son like on no other one of the children.

Now we're not here to talk about whether that's a right or wrong custom, but what God is doing perfectly and beautifully is He's taking this custom, which they all knew, and He's saying, "Pharaoh, how would you feel if someone was oppressing your firstborn son, the apple of your eye? How would you feel if someone was *assaulting* him and seeking to take his life? What would you do? *You* wouldn't be passive, would you? You would do something about it. *I* am not going to be passive either. You are oppressing these people. You are assaulting *My* people, and now I warn you, let them go."

That was the warning. It's a brilliant warning. It explains the injustice of what Pharaoh is doing. It says, "Understand this." But Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the entire world – and as the saying goes, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" - and so he hardened his heart. And in return God sent nine plagues - plagues of lice, plagues of locusts, plagues of darkness, things that destroyed their crops, things that destroyed their livestock - nine warnings to Pharaoh, but after many, many chances and after Pharaoh had trampled all of these chances underfoot, God in the end finally engages the nuclear option.

You can read it in **Exodus 11:4-6**, and it's an absolute spine chilling message. "So Moses said, "This is what the Lord says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. **Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again.**" God sends out the full force of His justice. He sends out the destroyer. He sends out the angel of death.

Now, if you read about the first nine plagues in the book of Exodus, in every case that God had sent out lice or locusts or hail or some kind of disease, *Israel's* land was not subject to it. The rest of the Egyptians suffered, but the land of Israel, the land of Goshen where they lived, was not subject to it.

But in *this* case - and this is the thing that's so surprising about the tenth plague - God said to the Israelites, "The destroyer is coming to *everybody*, and you can only be saved if you take some evasive action." In other words, it's unusual. It seems kind of odd. Why would the destroyer (we'll get back to this actually in a minute) come not only to the Egyptians but to *every* door unless there was something on that door?

And it's because the other plagues were not really *full* justice. They weren't commensurate repayment for the violence Pharaoh had been visiting on the Israelites. All of those other plagues were really warnings, but they really weren't commensurate repayment. But now in a sense - and occasionally you see this in the Bible and it's always terrifying - now God was letting forth Judgment Day early. The Scriptures teach that one day everyone will be called to give an account for what they've done. Well, God was bringing Judgment Day *down* on this land for one brief time. He was literally giving people what they deserved.

But, He says, in *that* case the Israelites will get it too unless they do something. Well, what did God tell them to do? He instituted what is today the longest continuously running religious festival in human history. God instructed that every Hebrew household slaughter a lamb, eat the lamb as part of symbolic meal and, finally, put some of the blood from the lamb on the sides and top of the doorframe leading into their house. Then, **Exodus 12:12-13**, "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will **pass over** you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."

It's the feast of Passover. God's justice will *pass over*, and you will be saved. But God said to the Jews, "Don't you think that just because you're Jews the angel will pass by. Oh no, you *must* put the blood. You must take *shelter* under the blood." And they did. And the angel of death came and passed by their homes, but the firstborn, from the Pharaoh who sits on the throne to the slave girl who works at the mill, they died. And then the Egyptians let them go. And they went out, and they escaped, but *why*? What does the lamb *mean*? Why observe Passover *every* year?

In this ordinance of the death of a lamb and taking shelter under its blood, God gave the Israelites and anyone who wanted to read the Old Testament a clue to the meaning of the universe. Now like any clue, it was incomplete on its own - it was a puzzle, a bit of a mystery. Do you remember a few weeks back when we looked at the story of Abraham? God had come to Abraham and said, "I want you to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering." Do you remember what we said then? Abraham did *not* complain that God was being unjust. Abraham knew - he had a good enough grasp of theology to know this - he knew that he was a sinner. He knew that Isaac was a sinner. He knew God is not unjust to ever demand *anybody's* life. God is not unjust to demand Isaac's life.

So Abraham was not struggling with whether God had the right to be just. He knew God would be just, but he

asked himself, "Is there any way for God to be just *and* merciful?" And it was on the way up the mountain as he was wrestling with this, and Isaac, going up the mountain with his father, said, "Father, I see the fire, I see the knife, and I see the wood, but where's the sacrifice?" And suddenly, Abraham groped out wildly, and he got an insight. It was an insight from God. He didn't understand it, but he said it.

He had been sitting in his tent all night, and he was waking up thinking about the same thing. He was thinking, "Yes, I know God can't *not* be just, and I know God can't *not* be merciful. He *has* to be just, and He *has* to be merciful, but how, how, how? Wait a minute." And when Isaac said, "Where's the sacrifice?" suddenly Abraham said, "God will show us a lamb. God will provide a sacrifice, a lamb. God will provide something else to die in your place. If a lamb dies, Isaac, you won't have to."

Abraham got the principle, and now here in the Passover ordinance, Abraham's wild groping became a yearly principle. If a lamb dies, you won't have to...but what does it *mean*? Any thoughtful person, any thoughtful Israelite, over the years would have to look at that and say, "Wait a minute. I get the principle. I get the *what* of the principle, but I don't get the *how* of it. I don't see how in the world the death of a cute little animal would get us out from under something we deserve. How could this be? How is it possible?"

And if you want to understand this principle, the clues God leaves in the Old Testament are found in three places. One is in Abraham's walk up the mountain, the second is here in Exodus and the ordinance of the Passover, and the third is in Isaiah. In a very mysterious statement at one point in one of his prophecies, he says, (**Isaiah 53:6-7**) "*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*"

You see, all of these are clues. The idea is if a lamb dies, you won't have to die, but how could that be? It all came together on one wonderful day. In the history of redemption, one of the greatest days was the day the last of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, was with his disciples. He looked at Jesus of Nazareth, and suddenly he understood. It must have all come together by revelation. It might have come together because he was thinking about it, he knew a number of things about Jesus, and he had been pondering the Old Testament.

But suddenly, on one day it all came together. And he looked at Jesus, and he said to his disciples, (**John 1:36**) "...*Behold the Lamb of God!*" In other words, Abraham going up the mountain, and the Passover, and what Isaiah said, it all came together, and he says, "Wait a minute. Behold, look, the Lamb of God. Not a lamb of God, *the* Lamb of God. God did not spare our firstborn sons because of the death of some woolly little cute creatures. He spared our firstborn sons because He didn't spare *His* firstborn Son."

"Behold...I get it." That's what it means. Do you want a translation of what "behold" means? It was John the Baptist saying, "I get it." Do *you* get it? Christians need to get it. Put it this way. If you had grabbed an Israelite on his way to the Promised Land after the Red Sea, and if you had just come up and said, "Who are you people, and what is going on here?" do you know what he would've said? The Israelite would've said, "Well, I can only put it to you this way. I was in slavery and under sentence of death, but I took shelter under the blood of the lamb. And now God dwells with us, and though we're in a desolate situation right now, He's taking us to our true country."

Now Christian, if somebody grabs *you* and says, “Who are you people, and what’s going on here?” what would you say to them? If you understand things, you’d say, “I was a slave under sentence of death, but I took shelter under the blood of the Lamb, and now even though there’s a lot of desolation around me, God dwells with me, and He’s taking me to my true country.” It’s the same thing.

This is the reason we’re told in Luke 9, when Moses showed up on the Mount of Transfiguration - Moses showed up and *talked* to Jesus, and the disciples saw it. In **Luke 9:31**, in a way that never completely comes out in your English translations, “*They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.*” In the Greek it literally says Jesus spoke to Moses about his own “exodus” he would accomplish in Jerusalem. It’s one of the most powerful and glorious wordplays in all of the Bible because the Greek word at that time, *exodus*, meant *both* death *and* escape. It could mean both.

And what Jesus was saying to Moses is, “My death *will be* the escape for my people. My death will be their exodus. *I’m* the Lamb. *My* blood will go over their door. The judgment of God will pass over them, and they will go out free.” Do you get it? Do you do what John the Baptist said you ought to do? Did you hear what he said? He said, “Friends, you should always be beholding the Lamb of God. Behold...look at it!” Look at Jesus *as* the lamb, and a tremendous greatness of life will develop.

This *is* the object of our faith. This is the thing we look at to become the people of faith we’ve been talking about all summer. Let me just show you, even though there are a number of things we get, what the main lessons are this tells us. What are the main lessons? I’m only going to mention two. I wish I could mention more. There are a lot more. From looking at Jesus as our Passover, Jesus as the Lamb of God, we get two lessons, and here they are.

### **First of all, we see that Everybody Deserves**

**Judgment.** Let me show you what that means and then why that makes an impact on us. The thing you learn here is it’s not the *Jews’* blood that saved them from the wrath of God, but it was the *lambs’* blood. This is a radical teaching. Moses specifically told the Jews, “Listen, the angel of death, the destroyer, this is the justice of God, and when the justice of God comes, if you’re not in your house under the blood of the lamb and the destroyer meets you, you’re history.”

You see, God did not send the destroyer to the Egyptians because they were Egyptians, and God did not save the Jews because they were Jews. (**Acts 10:34**) “...*God is no respecter of persons...*” Moses was specifically saying, “It’s *not* your pedigree. It’s *not* your achievement. It’s *not* your race. It’s *none* of those things. *Everybody* is subject to the destroyer, and *anybody* can be saved under the blood of the lamb.” But those are the only two distinctions there are.

Paul says it in **Romans 3:10**, “*As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one.”*” He says, “Pagan and religious, Jew and Gentile, nice and nasty, moral and immoral, all are alike under judgment.” Now, we can’t take too long to discuss this. But this is one of the most important teachings of the Bible, and here it comes out in such vividness.

If you and I are in the room and with us are two amoebas and one of the amoebas is four times the size of the other amoeba - compared to us that difference is negligible. In other words, it doesn’t register. They’re *both* invisible to us. One says, “Hey, I’m four times as big as this other guy!” We don’t care. Neither one enters into our consciousness. We are just so much greater than they are. We don’t even notice.

In the same way, here’s a person who is 400 or 500 percent more moral, more self-controlled, more loving than this one over here, but compared to the standard of *God Himself*, compared to the absolute purity, the absolute love, the absolute kindness, the absolute holiness, the absolute truth of God, the differences between you and me, the differences between the nice and the nasty, the differences between the moral paragons and the moral failures, are negligible, the Bible says.

Now how do we apply that? The fact is we are all subject to the destroyer, and yet we can all come under the blood of the Lamb. It’s not *your* blood, but it’s Jesus’ blood. It’s the Lamb’s blood *alone* that can save us. What is that? Let me just say something to those of you who *may not* be Christians - you’re not sure where you are; you’re maybe outside the faith - and to those of you who are inside the faith. This is a radical thing.

First of all, for those of you who aren’t sure what you believe, maybe you’re on the outside. Maybe you’re *thinking* about God. Maybe you’re thinking about Christianity. You’re wondering whether this is for you. This is good news. Do you know why? I don’t care what you’ve done. I don’t care where you’ve been. I don’t care how bad you’ve ever been. I don’t care what your record is like, and the gospel doesn’t either.

See people very often say, “Well, I need God. I need Him in my life. I need to connect, but I don’t know after what I’ve done.” Don’t you see what this is saying? It doesn’t matter whether you’ve been practically to the gates of hell. It doesn’t matter whether you’re guilty of murder. With the number of homicides we had in Austin in August, statistically speaking, some of you may be! It doesn’t matter what you’ve done. It doesn’t matter how dark the secret. It doesn’t matter what you’ve been living with.

Don't you see? You are no more hopeless than the most respectable person in the world, and you are *every bit* as capable of walking under that doorpost. Don't you see? It's not *your* blood. It's not your perfection but *his* perfection that provides this. It doesn't matter what you are. It doesn't matter what you've done. Come to the Lamb.

On the other hand, Christian friends, now listen carefully. Do *you* believe this? Do you believe we are no different than anybody else, that it's not *our* blood? See, we may say this, but there are all sorts of ways in which you can easily come into the Christian faith and in sort of deep and profound ways still think what makes you right with God is your blood. And in some cases there are people in the church who essentially think of themselves as superior because of their family – their church family. It's not your blood.

A little more normal thing to happen in a place like Austin is you've worked hard, you've invested in your education to get where you are. You've done an awful lot. You've attained. You've performed, and there's a tendency to look down your nose at people who haven't; who haven't worked that hard, who haven't sacrificed, and haven't gotten where you've gotten. It's not your blood!

We should be so open to people who are of different races. We should be so open to people who are of different classes. We should be so open to people who disagree with us, people who have different approaches, different cultures. *Nobody* should be more open to people different than Christians are because we know we're all under the destroyer and it's only the Lamb's blood that makes a difference. We are all under judgment. Think of what that means.

**Number two, Jesus' death is a propitiation** It is an atonement, and appeasing. The *meaning* of Jesus' death is it turns away the wrath and justice of God. I know this is the most unpopular doctrine. Why would the death of a man 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ, be relevant to you? I suggest, unless you understand Jesus as the Lamb of God, there *is* no relevance. I've heard people say, "Well, the good thing about it is we don't believe in the wrath of God and this blood atonement. We believe Jesus Christ's death showed how much he loved us. He showed how it's good to sacrifice for other people."

But in your effort to get rid of this idea of the wrath of God, in order to come up with a *more* loving concept of God, you have come up with a *less* loving concept of God. Don't you know? What did he do there for you?



The reason the destroyer did not go in to the doors where there was blood was because the destroyer saw that the blood had already been shed. The sword had already come down. Destruction had already happened, so the destroyer didn't go in. It was the wrath that had *already* fallen that turned away the destroyer. God never takes two payments for the same sin. One payment has to be made.

When Jesus Christ was on the cross, it got dark outside, but that was nothing like the darkness that happened *inside* his heart. A lot of people want to know what happened on the cross. What was so bad? I'll tell you what happened on the cross. The destroyer, the wrath of God, came to his door...and went in. The destroyer! If you don't understand Jesus as the Lamb of God, if you don't understand what he did on the cross was he took the wrath of God...

If you want to understand what happened, you have to just look at this word "firstborn". The reason God keeps calling Jesus the firstborn is not because, by the way, the Bible is trying to keep the law of primogeniture on the books. The reason is because God is trying to show you what kind of relationship the Father and the Son had. The Father and the Son had a relationship of love we cannot even imagine.

The Father is a fountain of joy, and whenever the Son turned to pray to the Father, heaven opened up...every time. In came a tidal wave of love, perfect intimacy with the source of all joy and love in the universe, *that's* what Jesus had, and on the cross when the destroyer came in, Jesus turned to the Father and what opened to him? *Nothing* but utter darkness, the abyss, hell. He was cut off. The destroyer went in.

Now, there are two kinds of sufferings Jesus had. He was nailed in his hands and feet. He was speared in his side. His head was pierced with thorns. And then the other kind of suffering was the destroyer came in to his door. Now if you don't believe the destroyer came in, you have no idea what Jesus did up there for you because the physical sufferings were just flea bites compared to the spiritual sufferings. In your effort to have a more loving God by saying, "I don't believe in the wrath of God and the blood atonement," you now have a less loving God.

I'll put it this way. The glory of God's mercy is not that it devours God's justice, but that it *satisfied* it. That's what Abraham saw when he understood the Lamb of God. Let me put it to you this way. If you found a person who had robbed you and you pulled that person into court and the judge looked down and said, "Well, yeah, this guy is guilty, but he looks sad, so let's just forget it," do you know why you'd be upset? Because mercy had devoured justice. Mercy had just eaten it up and had just laid it aside.

Abraham knew that can't happen. You don't want a God like that. You don't want to even have a *judge* like that in your town, do you? You don't want a God like that, but what you want is a God who's merciful *and* just. And on the way up the hill, Abraham said, "How can God be just and merciful - not a merciful god whose mercy devours justice, and not a just god whose justice devours mercy? I can't live with either. How, how, how could it possibly be both?" The Lamb.

See the glory of God is not that His mercy doesn't need payment, but that His mercy makes the payment. God is not like these ancient gods where you had to sacrifice to them to turn aside their wrath, like Agamemnon in *The Iliad*. He's not getting good winds. He can't get to Troy, so what does he do? He sacrifices his daughter. And the gods say, "Okay, I'm appeased," and then they let him go.

You say, "I can't believe in a God like that." You don't *have* a God like that because with pagan gods *you* have to propitiate. *You* have to do it. And do you know what? A lot of you are *still* doing it because you've turned religion into a commercialism. The reason you come the church, the reason you give money, and the reason you pray is you're bribing God. You're hoping God will somehow turn aside His wrath. If you're good enough, maybe He'll listen

to you. That's not Christianity. That's the paganization of Christianity. In Christianity *God* propitiates His *own* justice.

Let me close with a real, practical point here. If you don't have a God both of mercy *and* justice, if you don't have a God both of incredible grace *and* holy anger toward sin, you will distort yourself. Distortions will be injected into your life. Think about it. If you have a god in which mercy devours justice, in other words, if you have a god of mercy, and you say, "I don't believe in a God of wrath. I don't believe in a God of hell. I don't believe in a God who judges people and punishes people. I believe in a God who is just a God of love," you're like a child who has no boundaries.

They talk a lot about abusive parents, but also damaging is to not ever say "no" to your kid, not to ever contradict your kid, not to ever confront your kid, not to ever say, "These are the limits," and not to ever go head-to-head with your kid. If you don't and that child grows up without boundaries and that child decides any impulse is okay, that child grows up with a disorientation and a kind of spiritual vertigo. That child grows up not knowing which end is up. That child grows up feeling like an orphan, because practically they are.

And therefore, if *you* are growing up or if you have given to yourself a concept of a god of mercy *only* and not justice...you will feel like an orphan, because you *are*. If you do not have a God who can say “no” to some of your deepest desires, if you don’t have a God who can cross your will, if you don’t have a God who says, “These things are wrong,” if you say, “No, I believe in a god who would never, never contradict my deep feelings. If it feels so good, it couldn’t be wrong. I don’t believe in a God like that,” if you don’t have a God who can contradict you, you don’t have a God. You only have yourself. You feel like an orphan. You *are*.

But on the other hand if you have a god in which the justice eats up the mercy, if you have a god who is *all* standards and all righteousness and no grace and no mercy, friends, you’re going to be devoured too. You’re going to be a driven person, anxious, fearful. Only love can elicit love. Fear can’t elicit love. You’re going to always be fleeing and no one pursuing. You need *not* a god whose mercy eats up justice or justice eats up mercy. You need a God whose mercy *satisfies* justice, and that will only happen if you see the Lamb of God.

Don’t you see, friends? The reason Jesus Christ was so weak as the Lamb was because his love was so strong, and the more you look at how he loved you, it’ll make you a lion on the inside, and it’ll enable you to be a lamb on the outside. You’ll be able to be kind to people. You’ll be able to be gentle to people, no matter what happens.

Do you know why? Do you know why you’re never going to panic? Do you know why you’re never going to go crazy and you’ll stay a meek, gentle, peaceful lamb all the time? Because on the inside you’re a lion because you know what he did for you. You’re *beholding* the Lamb of God. Are you doing it? This is the love you want. No family love, no friend love, no parent love, no child love, no spouse love, no critical acclaim will ever fill you like this. “Behold the Lamb of God...”

We’re going to do that now the way that Jesus taught us to. Because on the night before his crucifixion, Jesus – who was Jewish – celebrated the Passover meal. But in doing so he changed it – he transformed it - into what we now celebrate as the Eucharist. Communion. The Lord’s Supper. And we’re told that whenever we – as a church – take this symbolic meal – the bread represents his body and the cup his blood – that we are “remembering” the Lord. We are beholding. So let’s do that as the ushers come to distribute the elements and the band to lead us in reflective worship...let’s behold him.