The Exodus

Exodus 12:29-13:16

Key Verse: 12:37 “The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.”

There was a young Russian prince who was struggling to overcome his guilty feeling after he had raped a maid-servant in his aunt’s house. He renounced his princely position to compensate his debt for the lady, who later became a prostitute. He followed her even to Siberia prison camp to ask the forgiveness from her about the wrongdoing he had done when he was young. Even though he was forgiven by her, he was not free from the guilty feeling. But when he read the Bible and heard the word of Jesus who died for the forgiveness of sin, he was converted. He experienced an unutterable joy of salvation and freedom when he met Jesus personally through the word of God. This is a short summary of Leo Tolstoy’s novel ‘Resurrection” written in 1899.

A few months ago, I had a chance to exchange life-testimonies while I was driving on a highway with a missionary friend. He described the day of his conversion as the day of jubilee and the day of liberation. He experienced the forgiveness of sin through Jesus and had a hope for the future with the meaning of life. According to his testimony, at that time as for him the world looked different from before he was born again. I experienced the same thing when I was born again. I felt the heaven opening and I was flying in the sky. It was the day of salvation and the day of jubilee. I believe those who were born again experienced the same thing like me, my friend, and the young Russian prince.

In today’s passage the Israelites finally leaves out of Egypt and starts their journey for the Promised Land. After the deadly ten plagues, Pharaoh finally surrendered to God and let the Israelites go so that they might worship God on their way. Let us study how they came out of Egypt, what God instructed them to do, and what the Exodus meant to them and to us.

First, the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt. (29-30) Look at verses 29-30. “***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***.” God’s will for the Israelites was to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a shepherd nation for the whole world, based on his promise with Abraham. (Ge 12:2-3, Ex 19:5,6) For the last 430 years in Egypt God multiplied their numbers big enough to become a great nation. In his appointed time God wanted to lead them out of Egypt and bring them to the Promised Land. This was God’s will and his heart desire for world salvation. God wanted the whole world to know him through the Israelites that he is the Sovereign Lord and the Creator of the universe. God sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to let the Israelites go so that they might worship Him. But Pharaoh rejected God’s message nine times. God gave nine plagues on Egypt so that Pharaoh might obey God and set the Israelites free. But Pharaoh hardened his heart and changed his words nine times. Finally God struck down all the firstborn in Egypt as he had warned him before through Moses. God’s punishment upon the stubborn and disobedient Pharaoh was so severe that there was no firstborn who didn’t die in Egypt including the son of Pharaoh, of all his people, and even of animals. The Bible says, during the night there was loud wailing in Egypt. (30) God paid such a painful and horrible price to release his people from the hand of Pharaoh.

It is irony that the day of devastation for the Egyptians was the day of liberation for the Israelites. As the history repeats, the victory in the Revolutionary War was the good news to the Americans, but sad news to the British. The holocaustic day of Japanese caused by atomic bombs was the day of jubilee for many countries in Asia which received freedom from Japanese occupation. No pain, no gain! The Israelites got freedom at the cost of the sacrifice of all the firstborns of the Egyptians. In the same way we received freedom at the cost of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ the Son of God. As God struck down all the firstborns in Egypt to liberate the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh, God condemned his One and Only Son Jesus to liberate us from the hand of Satan. As we studied last week, Jesus became the Lamb of God who was slain for our salvation and for our freedom! Praise Jesus who died for our freedom!

Second, the Exodus (the day of jubilee: 31-39) Look at verses 31-36. “***During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.” The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. “For otherwise,” they said, “we will all die!” So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.***” In the past Pharaoh denied their departure, but now he begged them to leave as quick as possible. There has been no person who wins over God the Almighty. We are God’s people. If God is for us, who can be against us? The day of departure was the day of jubilee for the Israelites. Imagine their Exodus! Look at verses 37-39. “***The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. Many other people went up with them, and also large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. With the dough the Israelites had brought from Egypt, they baked loaves of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves***.” Rameses was the store city which Pharaoh had built with forced labor of the Israelites. Pharaoh oppressed the Israelites to control their increasing population (1:11). In the city of Rameses the Israelites suffered more than we could imagine. The city was built by their blood, sweat, and tears. Now they were leaving from the city of pain and suffering and marching for the new land, the Promised Land which God had provided. Six hundred thousand men on foot plus women and children, around more than two millions of the Israelites, were leaving for freedom. This was the first time for them to breathe the fresh air of freedom for the last 430 years. Verse 40 says, “***Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years.***” They had been slaves in Egypt for 430 years! Can you imagine the length of 430 years? What happened in the world 430 years ago? It was the day when Shakespeare was writing his novels in England. It was 30 years before the Mayflower arrived in the land of America. Imagine from 1589 until now 2019 the Israelites have been slaves in Egypt! Could they really realize the meaning of freedom? Could they even dream the day of liberation to live as freemen? When they were passing through Rameses, the memory of all their past generations was reminded by them. For the first time of their lives, 430 years after Jacob’s family moved down to Egypt, the Israelites went outside from the city of Pharaoh as freemen without any guard of the Egyptian armies. The old men continued to praise the Lord for their freedom. Young men carried old people in their carts and drove all the cattle and herds before them. Children kept asking to them where they were going without the meaning and destination of their journey. The loud wailing did not stop in the cities of Egypt, but the loud praising continued in the crowds of the pilgrims.

The day of salvation is the day of Exodus for Christians to leave the city of Rameses. We were slaves to sin and suffered much under the control of Satan. As Jesus said, “*everyone who sins is a slave to sin*.” (Jn 8:34) We have been slave to sin until we were liberated by God who paid the price of our sins through the blood of Jesus. The day we received freedom was the day of our journey for new land, the Promised Land, the kingdom of heaven. As the Hymn says, “*We’re marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion. We’re marching upward to Zion, the beautiful city of God.*” The day of freedom is the day of jubilee. Have you ever heard about Ex-Muslims? They are those who left Islam and were converted into Christianity. There is one testimony of an ex-Muslim named Hazem Farraj, who was seeking for the answer for his life which Koran or Imam’s teachings couldn’t provide. Outwardly he was a devoted Muslim who prayed regularly, read Koran, and went to Mosque every week. But inwardly he was suffering from his dry and superficial life as a Muslim. One day he met a Christian couple who moved into his father’s apartment, and he was curious about the difference from him, which was their joy. He felt their real, not fake, and sincere inner joy through this Christian couple. They invited him to dinner, to Bible study, and finally to their church. It took three years for him to accept their invitation to their church. In the church he was touched mainly, not by the sermon of the pastor, but by the joyful people in the church. After the service he went downstairs in the church alone, knelt down, and prayed to Allah for his help. Allah answered through Jesus. After his prayer, something inexpressible happened in his heart which came from the Bible verse John 3:16. Koran taught him, “love not this, love not that…” but Jesus said “I love you! Love your enemies.” Hazem came to realize for the first time of his life that he was loved. He was loved by God through Jesus Christ. When he came out of the church, he felt that the gate of heaven was opening for him and that God appeared right before him and said, “Hazem, I love you. I love you so much.” It was the moment of his new life, and it was the day of his Exodus. He exited from the long tunnel of darkness as a miserable and condemned Muslim and entered into the wonderful life of light of Jesus Christ. It was the day of jubilee and the day of salvation for him!

After listening to his testimony, I learned two new things. First, there are many Muslims who are seeking for the answer and truthful advice for their lives, especially for their religion and salvation. I thought that all Muslims who approached me was to argue with me, but it was not the case. Like Hazem there are many Muslims who are looking for the real Christians who can provide answers for them. Second, our Christians must live an exemplary life for the world, especially for the Muslims. Hazem was attracted by the Christians’ joyful and thankful life. If they argued and fought every day and night in their apartment, Hazem would not be interested in Christianity. He was curious about their inner joy and envied their happy life.

Indeed, our life of journey to the Promised Land was the joyous procession. There should be no one who becomes grumpy or unhappy when they are marching upward to Zion. Before our eyes the glorious and holy city New Jerusalem awaits for us. We suffer much on this earth while we are struggling with health problem, security issue, financial difficulties, children education, broken relationships and so on. To someone taking the cross of Jesus and following him daily means to experience a daily death on the cross. Still, we have hope for the bright future because of the Promised Land, where we are marching on. We have the living hope of glorious resurrection and eternal life in the kingdom of God. This is the reason why we Christians should be happy and thankful in all situations. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Paul said, “*Be joyful always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus*.” We are all pilgrims who are marching onto Zion together hand in hand. We are chosen people, a holy nation, and a royal priesthood, who belong to God. Our journey to heaven may not be easy for us. There are a lot of challenges, temptations, persecution, and difficulties ahead of us. But we’ll not stop our journey. We’ll keep marching on until we enter into our Promised Land, the kingdom of God. Amen!

Third, the celebration of Passover (12:43-13:16) In verses 43-51 the LORD said to Moses about the Passover restriction. All the Israelites should celebrate the Passover according to God’s instruction. Those who wanted to celebrate among foreigners or slaves should be circumcised. No circumcision, no participation! God distinguished the holy from the common, and he provided an opportunity of celebration for the gentiles. This is the grace of God for the whole world.

In 13:1-16 God told Moses to consecrate every firstborn male to him (1-2). This was for the Israelites to commemorate the day of Exodus by God’ mighty hand who struck down all the firstborn men and animals in Egypt. (3) By eating unleavened bread for seven days they would remember their hasty departure. God also told them to teach their children the meaning of this day and help them to celebrate from generation to generation. (8-10,14-16) When their children ask about the consecration of the firstborn, they would answer about God’s mighty hand over the Egyptians for their Exodus. These days we are not consecrating our firstborn to God even though someone does it. But we must teach our children how to give thanks to God and how to live according to his word. Even though they don’t understand now our teaching and our journey to heaven, they will certainly understand us and join us. The day will come when they also experience the unutterable joy and satisfaction which we did and are doing now.

We have to pray for Exodus of this generation. There are many who need Exodus from their anger, hatred, selfishness, pride, fear and anxiety. There are many people around us who need Exodus from their addiction, depression, and compulsion. We have to pray for their joy of liberation and the day of salvation. Amen!