

All the Firstborn of My Sons I Will Redeem

Exodus 13:11-22, "And it shall be, when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your fathers, and gives it to you, that you shall set apart to the Lord all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be the Lord's. But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the Lord killed 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 males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt." Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt. And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you." So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people."

Let's pray. Dear heavenly Father dear God, we do ask that You, by Your Spirit communicate to us the meaning of this passage. That You use Your servant Jonathan to speak to us this morning and that You help us to understand the meaning of Your words. We thank You dear Lord for all the things You show us in Scripture, the picture of things set aside, the picture of sanctification, the pictures of redemption, the pictures of sacrifice, the pictures of Jesus Christ, the picture of heaven and the picture all the different ways oh Lord that You have prepared to do the work on earth that You are doing the work in eternity. I pray dear God that You would help us to see these things, that we would glorify Your name, and that we would serve You. Amen.

Before we get to the text, several months ago I remember having the discussion with Dan and other men in here about which book to go to next, what should we study, why should we study it, and that's when we decided to do Exodus and Leviticus and sprinkle Hebrews in along the way so we get an understanding of the law of God. The reasons that we discussed at that time were really internal reasons for this church, we have a lot of children that are getting to the age where they are moving from childhood to manhood and womanhood and it would be really good for those children if they were grounded in that law of God. That's why we thought it would be a

good thing to study the law of God. Where we are in the text, the official giving of the law of Moses doesn't happen for a couple chapters, doesn't happen until they are at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments and all that follows there, but we have been getting the prelude to the law, getting these ordinances. One of the last verses from last week said they need to do these things so the law of the Lord would be in their mouths. From the very beginning, separating Israel from Egypt, even in the midst of separating Israel from Egypt, God gives laws and ordinances to set Israel apart from the nations and to show them that He is their God. So in the midst of all the turmoil and disorder and lawlessness that we see happening right now, whether it's the hands of rioters, politicians, merchants, and pretty much everybody, if you want to say what's defining this year, the world is going to say this year is being defined by a disease, by coronavirus. This year is being defined as lawlessness and rebellion being openly displayed. It's a good thing that we're here in the midst of all this. It's an unpredicted blessing that God has us here studying the beginning of the giving of the law. Can you imagine if we were doing what the Bible has said to do, if the law of the Lord was in our mouths, if it was like a box between our eyes or on the back of our hand, do you think we would be where we are now as a country? If this was our practice, if we had the law of the Lord on our mouths, would we be seeing so much confusion, so much disorder, so much judgement from God? If we remembered the strong hand of God would be so rebellious? If we were constantly answering our children's questions about why we do these things, would we have been so quick to forget why we do these things? Also notice that here when God is giving these early laws to the children of Israel He does not wait for a nice, tidy, and quiet moment. He doesn't wait until they are past the Red Sea, He doesn't wait until they are in the Promised Land, He doesn't wait until they are in the houses. This is a camping trip of millions of people and in the middle of all of the turmoil and confusion with the little ones and flocks and herds, He is giving them the laws that are going to order their society. He is giving them laws that don't even apply until they get somewhere, but He wants them to know about them now. In the midst of all the turmoil and confusion we are seeing, this is a good time to be in the law of God, this is a good time to get introduced to the law of God. God doesn't wait until they get there to tell them these ordinances are for you, reset your calendars, remember this day, here's a recipe for bread at your feasts. He gives them that in the middle of a flight out of Egypt. The law of God is fitting for all seasons, it's fitting in plenty, it's fitting in want, it's fitting in slavery and freedom, it applies from birth to death and that's what we have in our text today. We get to see the law of God from birth to death.

Verses 11-13, "And it shall be, when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your fathers, and gives it to you, that you shall set apart to the Lord all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be the Lord's. But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem." So we get into the law of the firstborn here. "And it shall be when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites." Don't skip this part. This doesn't apply during the wilderness wandering, it's applied once they reach the Promised Land. Note that this is not a conditional phrase, this is not an "If" or a "maybe someday if we finally get there" statement. When the Lord brings you to Canaan. This is in the middle of a sermon Moses is giving to the

people and he relays the promises of God and he relates them as a sure thing. In Moses' mind this isn't a question. When you get there you're going to do certain things. Just as surely as God has done many wonders and brought them out of Egypt by His strong hand, He will bring them into Canaan. If God was so precise as to bring them out of their sojourn on the very day they hit the 430 years, surely He will finish the job and lead them into the promised land. This is a type for us, just as surely as God saves a man out of sin, just as surely He will sanctify him and receive him into heaven. That's what the journey out of Egypt and into the Promised Land is for us. You have the purchase out of slavery, you have a period of purification and sanctification, and then you have the picture of glorification when you receive the promise. This exodus is a picture of the Christian life. If Moses is saying this is going to happen, you're going to get there, then the same thing will happen to us. If God says something, He carries it through to the end. One of the major themes of Exodus has been the fulfilling of the promises made to the Patriarchs, especially Abraham. God is the God of your Fathers, He says. We heard that back at the burning bush and He makes good on His promises. We know from the New Testament, especially Acts and Romans that those promises to Abraham were not ultimately fulfilled at the Exodus or the conquest of Canaan, but refer to the coming of Jesus and the blessings for all the earth reserved by Him. But don't forget this, "when the Lord brings you into the land". Moses speaks of the future work of God with certainty, but the children of Israel don't really believe it. He says it like it's going to happen and then in just a few verses they're going to complain about being led into the wilderness to die, as if there were no graves in Egypt. 'Are there no more graves in Egypt that you brought us out into the wilderness?' That's what they say! After Moses has just said when God does this thing we will have more ordinances to follow, we will get to those later. Don't forget that when we get to the next chapter, they hear it but don't believe. We need to believe the promises of God. They have no confidence that the promises of God are true; they do not believe that God is not a liar. What are they actually supposed to do? What are the ordinances? Next verse, "that you shall set apart to the Lord all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be the Lord's." Now Moses takes us back to verse 2 of this chapter, where they are told to consecrate the firstborn. Our text from last week walked through the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a remembrance of the work that God did in bringing Israel out of Egypt, so that is our context for this law of the firstborn. It's all connected. It might seem disconnected where it talks about the feast and then what you're supposed to do with the firstborn, but Moses is clearly saying the two are connected. First we have the instruction that every firstborn male is to be God's. We'll get the explanation as to what that means and why in a bit, but the context here points back to the Passover night, where the Angel of the Lord passed through Egypt and spared Israel and killed all the firstborns, man and beast, of Egypt. The verb here in English obscures something that's much more clear in Hebrew. In verse 2 they are told to consecrate the firstborn to the Lord, that is, to set them apart, to consider them holy or special. Here in verse 12, the verb translated "set apart" is not the same as consecrate in verse 2. This is a very common word, occurring over 500 times in the Old Testament, and almost every other time that this word is translated it gets translated closer to its literal meaning--to pass over. You are to pass over all the firstborns to the Lord. This is the verb used in the last chapter in Exodus 12:12 and 12:23, where God says that He will "pass through" the land to strike the Egyptians. This is the word that is used when Israel is told not to let their children "pass through" the fire as sacrifices to Molech. This is the word

used when the children of Israel want to “pass through” pagan lands on their way to the Promised Land. This is the word that is used by the parents of Samson when he is consecrated, that no razor shall “come upon” his head, that is, “pass over” him. It’s a very common verb and in almost every case, except how it’s translated here, it’s some version of ‘pass over’, ‘pass through’, ‘go over’. You’re supposed to have a Passover, you are supposed to do these little reenactments of the Passover with your own firstborns, both man and beast. So I get the spirit of what our translators were trying to do when they rendered this “set apart” but right here, in this context, the literal meaning makes a lot of sense. When you get to Canaan, you are not to forget that God brought you out nor how God brought you out. What reminders are you to have? Annually, you start the years with 8 days of feast, the 1-day Passover feast and the 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, but also, every time that you have a firstborn son that opens the womb, everytime your ewes and cows and mares birth their first sons, you are supposed to have a mini-“pass over”. In a sense it’s almost like you have to be in the position of God because you have to look at what God did and try to do the same thing for the things under your control and you’re supposed to reenact the Passover. For your livestock, the clean animals (sheep, goats, cattle, etc.) would belong to God and be sacrificed. And then we come to this little instruction embedded in the midst of the law of the firstborn, that from your donkeys, you are either to redeem the firstborn colt or break its neck. Now I take it that “donkey” here is a stand-in for any domestic livestock that is unclean. When you get to Leviticus and you break down more details of the law you can see the mechanics of this and how it breaks down. From your donkeys you are either to redeem it or break its neck. Donkey’s are mentioned here (as opposed to horses or camels) likely because they would have been among the most common and widespread domesticated-yet-unclean beasts that the people of Israel had with them at that time. Horses are typically animals of war, but Israel wasn’t a nation of war yet. A donkey would have been an animal a slave would own. And here is a problem--donkeys, being unclean, are unacceptable as sacrifices. So, God says they belong to Him, but you cannot present them to Him in a typical way that is acceptable. This is good stuff here--can you see where this is going?

Here is a creature that, by its nature, is unacceptable to be presented to God; what are you to do with it? You cannot present them to Him in a typical way, you cannot sacrifice a donkey on the altar of God. Now, that law hasn’t been given yet, but we know from Noah and the patriarchs knew the distinction between clean and unclean animals. We don’t have a full list here in the books of the law, but we know that Noah knew a distinction between clean and unclean animals. From unclean animals he had pairs and from clean animals he had seven. So this is a distinction that even predates the law of Moses. You have a choice. You can either substitute it with an acceptable sacrifice, the text here says a lamb, or you must break its neck. I hope you get this. I don’t know that the Israelites would have gotten this, but hopefully those of us who have seen Jesus in the New Covenant, this is just telegraphing everything God is doing here. This is all gospel. This is us. Do you want to know which part of the story we get to play in the text? We are the donkey in this little pantomime. For us this is either the greatest blessing or the sign of abject terror because this describes every single person in this room. You are one of these donkeys or the other. For each one of us, God has a claim on us for which a payment is required. For each one of us it cannot be satisfied by ourselves, that payment cannot be satisfied except by substitutionary atonement, by being redeemed by a lamb. All Israel is redeemed by the blood of the lamb on the night of the 10th plague as a picture of salvation, and

then they are supposed to remember that picture by reenacting this event over and over again. Every time their livestock first births a male, an Israelite is supposed to look at that newborn donkey colt and “pass over” it, and the options correspond to what happened in Egypt; he will either redeem it’s blood with a lamb, or he will destroy it by breaking its neck. Why breaking its neck? There’s one other place where you have rituals surrounding breaking its neck and that is where you have someone who dies an unnatural death, looks like murder, and you’re unable to find who did it and you’re supposed to take a heifer in the field and break its neck and wash your hands of it. More or less saying, God we did our best with this, please absolve us of this. The significance of this is that it’s not significant. You don’t pour out its blood, there’s no ceremony or ritual with it. You just break its neck and then you have a carcass to dispose of. It just gets destroyed. These two options likewise correspond to us. We will either be redeemed by a lamb sacrificed in our place or we will be destroyed, and that without remedy. And those of you who are saved, you who are redeemed, do not think it is because of anything special in you; we are all donkeys in this tale. I think this is why the text talks about redeeming donkeys before it gets to redeeming sons; clearly sons are of more value than donkeys, but the ordering of the pictures here are set up so that we see where we stand before God. Just like donkeys, the firstborn of the sons of men belong to the Lord, and just like the donkeys, firstborn sons are unacceptable sacrifices to God. We know from later in the law that God detests human sacrifices, and we know that this is one of the things that will set Israel apart from the nations around them and we know that this is one of the reasons that God gives for the land vomiting out the Canaanites, because they sacrificed their sons. We usually come up with social or moral reasons why human sacrifice is wrong, and those are good and right in their own way. The people of God value humans as being made in the image of God and thus have to treat the death of them as different than other created things not made in the image of God. There’s no question about any of that. Yet, I think this text suggest to me another reason why the sons could not be sacrificed. They are, like unclean donkeys, unacceptable sacrifices in and of themselves. Because, like the donkeys, something needs to be substitute for them. They need redemption, but they cannot redeem themselves. They need a substitute, they need to be bought, they need Jesus blood poured out in their place in order to give them life. Because redemption is done by a perfect lamb, the price purchases life everlasting. And if you are not redeemed then you are marked for destruction.

Verses 14-16, “So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ that you shall say to him, ‘By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the Lord killed 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 males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt.” I think we should take this passage as both literal and figurative with no conflict between the two readings. I think the text forces us to do both. We should take it as literal in that we are to use the ceremonies of God as teaching tools for our children. This exactly mirrors the liturgy of the Passover, this exactly mirrors the liturgy of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, this is Deuteronomy 6. God puts these ceremonies in place so that

His people do not forget His mighty works and His strong hand; and the ceremonies are supposed to have an educational aspect to them. This is how you preserve a culture from one generation to the next. The rites have a purpose to them more than just performance of the rites themselves, they give you something to talk about. This is true of the redemption of the firstborn in ancient Israel, and it is true for us now. How do you keep the rituals of Christianity, baptism and the Lord's Supper, from dissolving into mere rote acts? Well, you talk about them to your children! And I would add, you probably need to clue your children into when they should be asking questions. You hope that your children will come to you and say "Father, dearest, tell me more about this, tell me more about God" but they usually have to be prompted to even ask the right questions at the right times. You're supposed to be training your children to ask the questions and ask them at the right time. So, this passage does offer literal applications of the things that precede it. The firstborn are the Lord's, but redeem your sons, and make sure you talk to your sons about it. These rituals that you would carry out every lambing season, every kidding season, every calving season, and every foaling season should have been to Israel as a perpetual reminder, like something right between your eyes or on your hand, of what God had done. Just like the last passage, they are supposed to be as frontlets, I don't think it's supposed to be literally on their heads or hands because I don't know how you can put the sacrifice of lambs and donkeys in a little box on your head. You can't do that. Yet, I think that this whole dialogue should also be read figuratively and should have been read figuratively by ancient Israel. The reason I think this is because there are a few odd things about it that make a completely literal reading awkward. Take that key phrase in the father's response to the son's question: "All the firstborn of my sons I redeem." I hope that grammar strikes you a little odd. It's not how I would have said it. If my son comes to me and we're walking down to the tabernacle and we just had a donkey colt so we're taking the replacement lamb and your son says, 'Well why are we doing this, why can't we sacrifice the donkey? Why do we have to sacrifice the lamb?' Depending on which one of my sons there would be more questions or less, but when they are asking that question, I can understand the response being the first part of the response that the text records "Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that open the womb" but then I would say something like "but my firstborn son (singular) I redeem." "All the firstborn of my sons" is a collective term, it's plural in the Hebrew, and most fathers would not have had a set of firstborn sons that needed redeeming. Firstborn sons don't come in batches. Unless a man had more than one wife through either polygamy or divorce/widowhood, then, firstborns really are something that you only get one of. My guess is that would have been the normal pattern for the majority of people. Cultures that practice polygamy and try to practice it widespread aren't really sustainable, it just doesn't work. So most of the cases I would think of, if you have a firstborn so it would be on. That's not what the text says so how are we supposed to understand this? God is not careless with grammar. We know in the New Testament that Jesus makes arguments about the general resurrection of the dead from the tense of the verb. God's not being careless with this, He knows what He is doing with this. This part makes sense to me most as God speaking in His voice about His people. After all, the whole picture of redemption by a substitute is so clearly a gospel picture, so it would seem that God is adding on top of that lessons about the assurance of salvation. The whole concept of the firstborn should be considered figuratively. We don't have time to look at the subsequent passages in the law about the firstborn, or the Levites as stand-ins as firstborns of Israel, but we should remember Exodus

4:22-23, the last of God's instructions to Moses in the wilderness, where He says to Pharaoh "Israel is My son, My firstborn" and then warns that if Pharaoh refuses to let them go, Pharaoh will see the death of his firstborn. So even here where we have a very literal thing about very literal, real firstborn sons, the concept of the firstborn is figurative from the beginning when God introduces it to Moses. Israel is the firstborn among the nations, but we should consider that the firstborn in the Old Testament is a type of the Church to come. Then go to the New Testament in Hebrews 12:22-23, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." That is, what we would call the "invisible church" is the congregation of the firstborn registered in Heaven. What does God say about the firstborn? All the firstborn of my sons I redeem. Remember where we are again, at the beginning of the revealed law of God for His people. They are told to reorder their calendars, they are told to have a feast and follow it up with a week long feast. They are told that there is to be equity among, one law for native-born and the stranger among you and now we get laws about the firstborn added to those. All of this happens before we get to what we think are the meaty laws, thou shalt have no other gods before me, don't kill each other, don't lie. Before God gets to any of that He says these things, the firstborn of my sons I redeem. If you grew up like I did in common evangelical churches, you were exposed to plenty of disdain for the law. This is still probably the common way evangelicals look at the law of God, as something that is thank goodness we are under grace, not law. But so far, and we'll see if this holds, every law God has given is colored by the gospel, it is all gospel. Let's see if that holds true, see if disdain for the law of God is something that can hold up because this law about the firstborn is about what Jesus does for His church. Every law has been grace. When the author of a book called Hebrews writes about the assembly of the firstborn, he is not just being poetic, but he is using the concept of the firstborn from the context of this text, from Leviticus and Numbers to a people who would have grown up in that in all their years. So when he says this about the firstborn this is the background for that. This is it--you want to know what it all means? It means that you have come to the heavenly Jerusalem where God redeems all those who are His by the blood of Jesus, better than the blood of Abel.

Verses 17-18, "Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt." Now we are back to the narrative portion of the text. Moses' sermon about the firstborn and the Feast of Unleavened Bread has ended and now we are back to, in a sense, repeating things from earlier to reset where we are. We get more details and mechanics about the actual journey out of Egypt, specifically, why they did not take the short route. It would have been fastest to go north from Goshen up to Canaan, but God did not take them that way. By shortest we are talking a few days, maybe weeks if you take your time, but Goshen is in the land of what would now be the Nile Delta or somewhere near there and the

fastest way through Canaan would be Southwest Canaan which is where the Philistines lived. The Philistines were warrior people and the Israelites were not. God did not take them that way because they were not prepared for war. They were a people that had been enslaved for some generations and that is not the recipe for waging war with Philistines. And we know God is not wrong. How do we know this? Even when they get to the land and spy it out, all the spies can talk about are the giants in the land and they say "We are as grasshoppers in their eyes." These are the same people who are going to cross through the Red Sea, these are the same people who saw the death of the firstborn, the water turned to blood, they saw plagues of flies and frogs and they look at giants and it's too much for them. They're not ready for war. In the meantime, even in this text you can see God is preparing them for war. How do we know He is preparing them for war? The text says they went up in orderly ranks. The word there for orderly means more or less that they went up by fives. What do you do when you're trying to train an army? What's the first thing you do? You teach them how to drill, you train them in order. It's the first thing that anybody who is training an army does, you get them regimented so that's what God is going. They're not ready for war, but God is working on it.

Skip verse 19, we're going to come back to verse 19.

Verses 20-22, "So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people." Geographically, Goshen was in northern Egypt, near or in the present day Nile delta. Succoth is to the south of the delta, and Etham is somewhere yet further south, perhaps in the present-day Sinai peninsula. So the Promised Land is Canaan, which is north, and they are going south. We don't know exactly how far, we don't know where, but we do know they are going the wrong directions in human terms. Now we know explicitly how God led them, not just by Moses' instructions, but by a visible representation. This is not Moses out in front leading the people, this is not the cult of Moses, which they turn into and it doesn't go well for them, but this is God leading them. There's so much we can say about that. We will not talk too much more about this pillar right here as we get to visit this again in a later and more detailed text shortly. The pillar of cloud becomes a character in the story and amazing things happen, full of typology. The pillar of cloud goes behind the people to protect them, it turns dark for the Egyptians and light for Israel. It's called the angel of the Lord so is this pillar of cloud the picture of the Spirit of God? Is it a picture of Jesus? Yes, probably. What the text is emphasizing right here is that as they are going out they are not following Moses. Moses is the one speaking to them and interpreting and telling them what to do, but they are following the pillar that is God, the Lord going before them in glory. I say that this is 1 pillar that has the appearance of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, not 2 things. It's not that there is a pillar by day that's a cloud and then it appears and at night it's a pillar of fire. If you go to Numbers 9, it says they are one in the same thing. Numbers 9 talks about the completion of the tabernacle and the Lord ascends on it as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. So it is there so it's visible to them in the day and the night. This is one of

progressively larger appearances of God in Exodus. He appears in a burning bush earlier in Exodus, now He appears as this pillar of cloud/fire big enough that millions of people can follow it, and then He will appear in thunder and lightning and cloud and fire and smoke on Mt. Sinai that all the people will see. So God is progressively showing Himself bigger and more powerful and even then we know He is holding back. What are we to take from this? Day and night God was there to lead His people. Do you think that is too simplistic? I know there is more to say, but I don't want to get away from the message. Day and night God leads His people and it never disappears from them. The glory of God in a cloud is leading the people, and they are led by it, and yet they don't believe in God. In just the next chapter, when they show their fear of Pharaoh's army, when they say "were there no graves in Egypt", the pillar is right there. They've been following this cloud, this fire, and they see an army and they don't believe God. They don't believe the preaching of Moses, they would rather be slaves in Egypt. This is an example to us. God may not be taking us the route expected, God may not take you what you think is the most straightforward path, and He may even have you on the brink of apparent peril, but He always takes you the best way. Likewise, in the many cases where God is clear where we should be following Him, which is in His word, do we believe it? It says things plainly for us, and yet we decide not to follow because we're afraid of some present danger. That brings us to Joseph, a man who certainly took the long route, who endured the acts of those meant for evil but that God meant for good.

Verse 19, "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you.'" It is all one story. Your Bible is just one story. You parents who grew up Sunday-schooled, you might have heard of David and Goliath, Daniel and the lion's den, Jonah and the whale, Noah and the ark. You probably did the coloring pages and macaroni crafts for them, too. What story did you hear about Joseph? His coat of many colors! Why, because it is safe, and makes for the best coloring pages, you can use all the colors. But when it comes to Joseph, this is the best part, and not just because Joseph was a mummy. Kids did you get that? I know you're homeschooled and I know you know what happens in ancient Egypt. If you have a body, what they did with the body of Joseph, when Joseph died they embalmed him and put him in a coffin. I tell you, when ancient Egyptians embalm a body and put it in a coffin they are making a mummy. Adults, did you ever get that in Sunday School? Did they tell you that Joseph was a mummy and they took a mummy with them on the Exodus? I never saw that on a coloring page. This is the best part. How do we know it is the best part? The New Testament tells us. Go to Hebrews 11:22, "By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones." This is the good stuff, this is really good. Joseph had it good, he was possibly the most famous man in all the world during his day that wasn't a ruler. And while it is no small honor to be included in the Hebrews 11 "Hall of Faith", wouldn't you think that Joseph did greater or mightier or more-faith filled things in his day besides his funeral arrangements? How about enduring slavery and captivity, resisting the temptations of Potiphar's wife, interpreting dreams, or administering both national and international famine relief efforts that saved many alive? Joseph was a big deal in his day, he had it all. Nope. None of that. When it wants to give you the greatest moment from Joseph's

life, it was when he said what to do with his bones. Why was this so great? Why are these funeral instructions worth setting alongside the martyrdom of Abel, the building of the Ark, and destruction of Jericho and the faith of Rahab? Why put this next to all these amazing acts? Because he made mention of the departure of Israel. For him, that's the equivalent of saying he told the gospel insofar as he knew it, God would surely visit them. At the time of his death, he had no great pressing need to want to go back to Canaan. He was one of the greatest men in Egypt, he was married to the daughter of a famous priest, he lived to an old age, he lived to an old age, seeing his great-grandchildren, he got to bury his father in his own land, he had reconciled with his brothers. Life was good in worldly measures. He had enough that when his brothers came to him he could provide for him and their little ones. He wanted nothing, but Joseph had something better than all that. But Joseph had faith. Joseph had a life of ease and wealth and fame and prosperity, but that did not cause him to turn away from God nor forget the promises that there was something better in store. How easy that is, how often it is that prosperity causes us to forget God. Jeshurun, you grew fat, you grew thick, you are obese! You have forgotten the God who fathered you. No, Joseph is just like Moses, maybe even a model for Moses, of whom Hebrews 11 says he esteemed that there were greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Joseph had all the treasures of Egypt and he esteemed there was something better than that. Remember the first line in our text for today, "when the Lord brings you into the land..." Joseph believed this as certainly as Moses, even though it was generations away. Joseph said the Lord would visit them and when He does to take his bones with them. He makes them swear an oath to that. This is not just a senile old man saying what he wants for his funeral, he is telling the gospel to the generations after him. Joseph knew that God would not forget him and that God is not slack in His promises. A pharaoh may arise who forgets Joseph, and this is great, you can do all the great things in the world and they world will forget about you, but God will not forget. Joseph wanted his bones to be a reminder to Israel as long as they dwelt in Egypt that this is just a momentary sojourn, they are just there for a little while. God will visit us and take us out of here. We don't know where the bones were stored. A day is coming when you will pack up and leave because God visits you. Would Joseph let Israel forget promises made to his great-grandfather, and repeated to his grandfather and father? Joseph says literally, not over his dead body. We don't know where the body had been kept, roughly 160 years, or who remembered it, other than that our text says that Moses fulfilled the oath and took the bones of Joseph with them. Maybe it was Moses himself who knew and asked for the body, while all Israel was asking for treasures of gold, maybe he, as a former prince of Egypt knew where this former Egyptian dignitary was buried, or maybe it was the sons of Ephraim or Manessah who tended to the body or were custodians of where it was kept. We don't know. Regardless, the text is forcing us back to the end of Genesis, where Joseph reminds his relatives of promises that are made 3 generations earlier than him. So Joseph is sort of in the middle. The text gives us seven generations that are covered when Joseph says this, three generations before him and yet he has great grandchildren, so there is all this span of time and Joseph is making sure they don't forget that God made promises to Abraham that He would visit them and take them out. We know from the New Testament that this promise is made to Abraham, but they are really about Jesus and the Church and the gospel going to all the earth and our inheritance in heaven. Your Bible is not a bunch of disconnected Sunday school stories about people fighting villains, or like so many Aesop's fables stitched together. It is one long

tale of the enduring goodness and faithfulness of God, from Abraham to Joseph to Moses to Jesus to heaven and eternity. It's all one story. Just a few verses earlier in Hebrews 11, this is said of the Patriarchs, but it is plainly true of Joseph as it was Abraham. Verses 13-16, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had the opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." Even Abraham knew the promises were not about the country, there was a heavenly country. What is that country? We read that bit earlier. It is in Hebrews 12, the Heavenly Jerusalem, the assembly of the firstborn whose names are recorded in heaven. Even today, with this text that looks like two texts that look broken apart, it seems to break so clearly from the law of the firstborn to the Exodus route, remember that your Bible just tells one story about the enduring goodness of God to His people and His faithfulness to them.

Applications:

1. Which donkey are you? You owe something to God that in and of yourself you cannot pay now and can never hope to pay and you can't earn. Something needs to be paid for you. Are you unclean in yourself redeemed by the blood of a lamb or marked for destruction? Note--there is no third option. You have the donkey that is redeemed or the donkey that gets its neck broken. It is either Jesus and life or unceremonious destruction.
2. Parents, you know already that you are supposed to be speaking of the things of God to your children; if you are not doing that, please start yesterday. But add this to it: train your children to ask questions. Train them to ask the right questions at the right times. This can be done both explicitly saying, "Son, I want you to ask me about this when we get home" or implicitly by living your life in such a manner that what you are doing are things of God so when your child asks why you are doing this thing of God, you can talk to them about it.
3. Children, do you know your application? Do you know what the Bible tells you what you are supposed to be doing? Ask questions! You are supposed to ask your parents questions about the things of God. Ask your father and mother about why we do what we do. Ask them about God and Heaven and what "redeemed" means and why we pray at mealtime and what is the Lord's Supper and everything. It's okay to ask them all the questions. Why? The Bible says that these things are supposed to be like they are right between their eyes and on their hands, you're not supposed to be able to get away from them, so ask them all the things all the time.
4. Trust that God knows where He is leading you. No reason to overcomplicate this one. Trust Him in the midst of ease and trust Him in the midst of slavery and when you are backed up to a Red Sea. Trust Him in Covid season and trust Him in economic

depression and trust Him election season. Trust that He knows what He is doing with His people even if it looks like you're taking the southerly route when you want to go north. Even if God says He is taking you the northern route, sometimes He takes you south.

5. Regarding Joseph, what a way to die--when your last moment is your best, when your last moment is the moment that all history records as the peak of your faithfulness. Every one of us is dying. Me, you, my child not yet born. Every one of us faces a last moment. For some of you, that should be cause of fear and terror. If that is you, repent. The blood of Jesus is free for you, costing nothing and buying everything. Repent. For some of you, that last moment is the beginning of bliss forever. Be like Joseph, finish strong, go out with your most faithful moment, go out with the gospel.

Heavenly Father, You are so good to us. You are so good to show Yourself to us. You are so good that You progressively prove Your will, Your kindness, Your mercy, that You warn us of destruction and judgement, that You offer salvation and You buy our redemption. We pray that You would teach us from the passage. In Jesus' name, amen.