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Torah: Exodus 10:1-13:16

Haftarah: Jeremiah 46:13-28

Brit Chadashah: Romans 9:14-29

Reading: Jack pp. 101-103 and Psalm 77. Jewish hero: Esther. Torah Carrier: Art

Over the space of calendar year, Moses took the signs of the main Egyptian gods and turned them into curses, month by month. Egypt was left in shambles when the people of Israel were finally allowed to leave with Pharaoh's permission and with the people's blessing. They did not sneak out when no one was looking. After an entire year of plagues where all resistance to their departure was removed, the people walked out, as a covenant people, released from slavery and enriched by their former masters.

The account mentions that on the 10th day of the month of Nissan, they were to select a lamb of a kid and keep it tethered by their homes. After making his final announcement to Pharaoh about the death of the first born at the new moon, the Egyptians had to see that the people were serious and when they saw the lamb or the kid tethered by the Jewish homes, they knew what was coming and those who wanted to avoid losing their first born, had time to meet the ritual requirements of the feast before it was too late.

The mixed multitude were Egyptians who went through circumcision and who participated in the ritual meal and who walked out of Egypt with the children of Egypt. None of the mighty gods of Egypt had been able to stop the Jews and future generations were to remember the events surrounding the exodus every year at the same time that it happened. The passing over of the angel of death was a one time event which was not repeated in subsequent years and so the blood was no longer put on the door frames of the houses.

It takes a careful reading to reconstruct the events of the exodus and all of the modern ceremonies of the Seder recall the events of this one time exodus of an entire population and their long journey out of Egyptian held territory. The requirements of the actual event are remembered, but the event is not replayed in its fullness, year by year. At least four requirements of the original event are not repeated, only remembered: the tethering, the blood, circumcision and despoiling the Egyptians.

The time between the tethering and the Seder gave those believing Egyptians time to prepare their own Seder and Jewish people no longer select and tether a lamb or a kid on the 10th of Nissan. The blood is remembered but is no longer applied to the door posts and people are no longer required to stay in the place where they hold the Seder until morning. Jewish people now often invite their neighbours to the Seder, whether they are circumcised or not because the Seder is no longer considered a ritual of conversion – it is a ritual of remembrance.

Finally, our neighbours are no longer despoiled and we no longer get up in the middle of the night and get out of dodge. We remember the exodus, we do not repeat it.

We still abstain from leavening for seven days, because our ancestors had to walk for seven days and nights in order to make it out of Egyptian territory and be able to stop long enough for their dough to rise before they cooked their bread. We no longer get together and undertake a

seven day journey on foot, carrying our possessions in carts or on our backs.

The Egyptians had to be shown that their gods were powerless to help them and that it was futile to resist the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Pharaoh was playing an expensive game and held out so long because he felt that when the Jewish G-d pushed too hard, one of the Egyptian gods would rise up and put Him in His place.

Every month, the Egyptians would worship the god of that month and their most important god was worshipped at the first new moon of spring. Just as the rising of the waters of the Nile brought new life to the land, this god was believed to come back to life and bring new life to the land. He was the first born god whose death and resurrection was an important part of the religious life of the Egyptians.

G-d knocked off each Egyptian G-d, month by month and declared that Israel was His first born and because the Egyptians put their trust in false gods, they would pay the price of Israel's freedom by the loss of their first born children, whether it was the first born son or daughter. It is amazing to me that they still clung to their defeated gods and asked the Jewish people to leave for fear that they would also be killed by YHVH, the G-d of Israel.

Those who abandoned their false gods formed a mixed multitude of Egyptians which joined in the exodus and was gradually absorbed into the tribal life of Israel. There are still many people today who are resisting the call of the only true G-d and we are called to remember that all false gods will eventually be defeated, because resistance is futile. And when it comes time for us to leave this world behind and enter the eternal kingdom, it is not just the first born who will perish, but everybody who has not heeded G-d's warning as it is outlined in His Word.

The exodus was a one time, unique event in world history, but its message is as clear now as it was back when the events actually happened, but with a difference. G-d gave His own Firstborn Son and when we take refuge under His blood, we escape from the power of death and begin a long journey out of the Egypt of this world towards His everlasting kingdom. We even pass through a symbolic version of the waters of the Nile when we experience Tevila (Baptism) and our testimony to the world is that judgment is coming and resistance is as futile today as it was for the Egyptians so long ago, who foolishly refused to let G-d's people go.

We still need to resist the leavening of this world and we still have to resist the encroaching darkness of the defeated god of this world and shine as salty lights, while we eagerly await the final arrival of the Kingdom of David's Greater Son. Resistance is futile – how much futile resistance have you allowed to creep into your life? Our enduring call remains to always seek first G-d's Kingdom and His righteousness and to make sure that all of the Egyptian darkness is purged from our hearts and lives. Our lives are to be lived free of the leavening of sin and darkness as we remember the two Passovers which have impacted our lives. The first one was when Pharaoh surrendered and let our people go and the second was when our L-rd surrendered His life to die for our sins. That is what the L-rd's Table is all about.

Sermon: **Confidence in the Kingdom: Doing our Best to be Faithful**

Passage: *Think of us in this way, as servants of the Messiah and as stewards of the mysteries of G-d. Furthermore, it is required of stewards that they be found to be faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human tribunal. I do not judge myself either because I am not aware of being guilty of anything.*

But it is not for this reason that I am justified. The one who judges me is the L-rd. Therefore, judge nothing before the time, when the L-rd shall come and bring to light things which are now hidden in darkness and will manifest the motivations of the hearts. Then each shall receive from G-d the appropriate commendation. (I Corin. 4:1-5)

It is not uncommon for people to second guess decisions and wonder if we have really done the right thing. The apostle Paul was trying to deal with a fractious congregation and may have wondered if he did the right thing in the way he handled them. He was not being boastful when he said that he was not aware of being guilty of anything, he was just saying that he always tried to do his best to be faithful.

Believers and those who lead them need to see themselves both as servants of the Messiah and stewards of the mysteries of G-d. This means that our main objective and singular purpose is to promote faith in the Messiah – His birth, death, resurrection and eventual return. We need to be accurate in what we say about our Messiah and neither add nor subtract from the key elements of our proclamation. There are things about our Messiah and the kingdom which we cannot really explain, because they are mysteries which we accept by faith, because of our faith in G-d and His Word.

Part of this faith is our confidence in the Kingdom, where anything and everything will be explained and where what is really in people's hearts will be brought to light and no longer remain hidden. We may often wonder if we could not have done things differently or done things better, but that is not the basic question we should be asking ourselves. You see it is often more important to examine the reason or reasons behind our actions than it is second guess decisions which we have made in good faith.

There is always room for improvement and we should be asking ourselves if we really have done our best, but it will always be more important to examine the motivations of our hearts. We are not perfect people, and we all have our flaws and our limitations and we should not get angry at people because they didn't do as good a job as we would have liked. In hind sight, Paul likely wished he could have done some things differently and he was not afraid to learn from his mistakes and learn to do a better job.

He realized that at best, he could only do his best and trust the results to G-d. As I think of each of you during the week and hold you up in prayer, it is my prayer that you are learning to do your best and not being stalled or sidetracked by always second guessing yourself and wishing you could have done a better job. This is the subtle trick of the enemy when at the very beginning of human history he convinced Cain that his efforts would never be good enough, so he had better get rid of the competition. G-d gave him the opportunity to learn from his mistakes and was not angry with him because of these mistakes. It was how he chose to try to disguise his mistakes through murder which was the problem.

I frequently wish I could have said something that would have changed people's minds so that they would have remained in fellowship with us. I also sometimes wish that I hadn't said something which may have caused them not to want to fellowship with us. But the bottom line is that we cannot please everybody and we have to learn to stand our ground on the things which make our congregation the unique, safe place that it is, full of imperfect, flawed people trying to do the best job they can with the resources that we have – as we wait patiently for the resources which we do not yet have.

I want to use our collective hind sight to motivate us to grow and to mature and not to make ourselves miserable because we really should have done things differently, even though it was the best we could have done at the time. As a smaller congregation we will struggle to do the best job we can with our limited pool of volunteers, but we must never lose confidence in what we have done or in what we will be able to do in the future, once we have more resources.

I believe that our vision is sound and that we are doing the best we can as we plan for the future which the L-rd has in store for us. As we look back in retrospect and consider what could have been and perhaps even that which should have been, I want to borrow some advice from that enigmatic and often controversial politician, Sir Winston Churchill. He often referred to the Second World War as the war that didn't have to happen and many of his schemes for winning it were later found not to be helpful. But his faith in his nation's ability to win the war and his resolve to fight it even to his last breath, inspired people around the world not give up their fight against the tyranny which was trying to cover the globe.

As he wrote his memoirs he said that he was often on the wrong side, but he was never on the side of wrong. During the First World War, if the British fleet at the battle of Gallipoli had followed his orders, even though they were taking heavy loses, the Turks would have surrendered. It came out later that they only had five minutes worth of ammunition left and the commander was writing up his surrender when the British fleet suddenly withdrew and the war went on for years longer than it should have done.

He was also the one who coined the phrase: "the Iron Curtain" about the Soviet Union and was reported to have said: "if you cannot defeat your enemies, out live them." He was willing to explore any idea which would help the war effort and though many of his ideas were good, many of them were also worthless. As we examine the progress of our shul and some of the setbacks we will undoubtedly experience, rather than beating ourselves up and wishing we could have done things differently, we need to constantly be determined to be faithful to our vision and our calling and be willing to do things differently within the scope of our congregational limits. We will never be on the side of wrong.

We have a distinct call to be an outreach to both the Jewish community and to the Gentile churches and I do sometimes get discouraged because our limited pool of volunteers is often taxed to the limit as we continue to experience the revolving door phenomenon. But in mature reflection, I am just glad we were allowed to have some of the people who have wandered through our shul for the length of time they stayed with us. I want us to continue to do our best to have our needs met in the context of our congregational ministry and I am grateful for the effort so many of us put in every week to make our services a success.

I am also grateful for our internet outreaches and the good relationship we have with our landlords. We continue to be a safe place for people to explore the grace and wonder of our Saviour in a Messianic Jewish context and, all things being considered, we do have a bright future ahead of us.

I want us to all continue to do the best job we can with our limited resources and to trust the L-rd to give us greater stability and growth as we walk with Him in faith and obedience. We are really a Sabbath powered, Festival driven shul and some of the challenges we have faced have been hard to bear. It seems that we take a few steps forwards and then get knocked a few steps back, but that is the reality of spiritual warfare and both the real price we have paid in the

process and the actual progress we have made for the kingdom will only come to light on the day of His return.

And even though it is incredibly rewarding to walk with the L-rd through all the valleys and over all the mountains as we wander through this life on our way home, we need to have confidence that our calling in the kingdom is to do the best job that we can. Our bottom line performance goal should always be, to be faithful as servants of the Messiah and as stewards of the mysteries of G-d. What we do as a community and how we do what we do as a community, will always be open for negotiation, because we are not afraid of change and remain open to new ideas. Some of them will be helpful, others not so much.

We will not always get it right and sometimes we will be misunderstood and even do our fair share of misunderstanding. But as long as we set straight paths for our wounded feet and keep walking on the straight and narrow to the best of our ability, then we need never be afraid what will surface about us, on the day when all the heart motivations are revealed. We will receive from G-d the appropriate praise because we are committed to be His faithful servants and stewards who always strove to do their best.

And in some issues, we may end up on the wrong side, but like Mr. Churchill, we will never be on the side of wrong, because our best is always good enough for the Messiah. He rewards faithfulness, not perfectionism. While I may not be happy with some of things we have gone through, I remain satisfied that we have always been faithful to our calling and we want to keep on doing our best for the Messiah and His coming kingdom.

We have a potential that we will keep on reaching for and rather than filling our hearts with regret and bitterness because the progress we want remains elusive, we will always pick ourselves back up, readjust our load and keep on walking in the direction of our particular calling.

We want to keep on learning and keep on trusting the L-rd, both for the help we need in the trials that we face and for that which Paul called the exceedingly abundant provision of G-d which is beyond all that we can think or ask.

We never want to put limits on what we believe G-d can do in our midst and yet we want to learn to be content with both what He brings our way and with that which He refrains from providing us with. Our job is to do our best and be faithful to our calling, as we wait for that final finish line, on the other side of which, our true reward is waiting for us to claim.

May our confidence in the Kingdom comfort us in times of trial and sorrow and may we always be found faithful to our calling in our particular context. May we never grow discouraged because we are not perfect and because there will always be room for improvement. Like patient farmers and patient shepherds we need to learn to wait for the crop to ripen and for the flock to increase. And may our lives never be defined by the setbacks we have to recover from, nor by the roadblocks we have had to manoeuvre around.

May our lives be defined by the faithfulness we continue to show to our calling and by the confidence we continue to have in the coming kingdom, whether our ride gets bumpy or whether the sailing is smooth. Some things may not be resolved in this life and the motivation of some people's hearts may remain a mystery until we all stand before the L-rd and all the darkness is finally fully dissipated.

May we also be liberated from the folly of continually second guessing ourselves when we have done our level best and it doesn't seem to be enough. Our sufficiency needs to be in the L-rd and we need to be continually working things out in the L-rd, as we learn to do things His way and not just according to ourselves. The joy of the L-rd needs to be our strength and we have to remain convinced that the plans He has for us, are for our welfare and not for harm, as He continues to give us a future with hope.

We may not always be able to see what that future looks like exactly, but we can know with blessed assurance that our true citizenship is in the coming kingdom, no matter what we have to endure and recover from until we get there and are finally home forever. Serving the L-rd in a Messianic Jewish context may have its challenges, but at the end of the day, as long as we are learning to bloom where we are planted, there is nowhere else where the grass is greener.

As we come and observe the L-rd's Table in a few minutes, may it be a time where we take stock of our lives and renew our determination to be found faithful, doing our best for the Messiah and His coming Kingdom. If there is any darkness which has been trying to creep in to our lives, or any wounding which wants to fester in our hearts, may our proclamation of His death and resurrection, remove them from our hearts and lives. May our earnest hope and our expectation be that nothing shameful is allowed to remain part of our lives, even if it takes more time than we like for the Messiah to be glorified by our lives, whether we live or whether we die.

May all of us continue to find our place of service in our community and continue to do our best to be found faithful by the L-rd, both in this life and the one which is to come.

How is your confidence in the kingdom doing? Are you doing your best to be faithful to the calling you have received in the L-rd? Are you praying for the advancement of the ministry of our shul? Are your eyes firmly fixed on the coming Kingdom? Are you learning to judge nothing before the time, when the kingdom shall appear? Do you fully realize that your best is good enough for G-d? With all of your limits and flaws, are you convinced that G-d can use you and bless you, even when you do not always get it right?

This week is ending, may you have a blessed, time in the coming week. Shabbat shalom.