

**God's People**  
Exodus 12:43-13:16

*Have you ever wondered what you need to know to be a Canadian citizen?*

It occurred to me earlier this week that I have never really given that much thought.

As a natural born citizen I did not have to travel here from a different country, I did not have to fill out paper work (although my parents did), I didn't have to go through a waiting period, and I didn't have to take a test.

For some reason though I was curious to find out whether or not I could pass the citizenship test earlier this week.

I went on to google to see if I could find a practice test and I found one provided by the *Richmond Public Library*.

They have a bank of 100 questions but according to the government's website the actual test is 20 questions, you get 30 minutes to write to test, and you need to get 15 questions (75%) correct in order to pass.

I decided I would try the test three times to see how I would do each time getting different questions.

My first time through I squeaked by with 75%, on my second time through I managed an 80%, and the last time through 100%.

Full discloser, I actually deserved the 75 and the 80, I just guessed better on the 100% mark.

*The biggest lesson I took away from that exercise was how much I take my citizenship for granted having been born into it.*

That got me thinking about another citizenship that is far more important than any other that we find on this earth.

The Bible calls those who know Jesus as Lord and Saviour citizens of heaven.

When I think about the idea of being a citizen immediately the idea of belonging comes to my mind.

If you are a citizen of Canada then Canada is where you belong.

Likewise, and more importantly, if you are a citizen of heaven then the place you most belong is where God is.

Going a little deeper it is more than belonging with God it means belonging to God.

[That is the subject of our text this morning **Exodus 12:43-13:16**. A number of bible scholars see the Israelites Exodus from Egypt as the defining moment when Israel officially becomes a nation according to God's promise to Abraham around six centuries before. When they were in slavery they appeared to belong to the king of Egypt, but now as they have been freed it is clear that they belong to God. The same is true for the Christian, we belong to God and so there are

at least four things that we need to learn from this text about being God's people. Number one...]

**Point #1 – God's people belong to Him by faith.**

No one is either automatically accepted or rejected by God on account of their genetic makeup, but rather a person's status before the LORD is determined by whether or not they trust what He says.

As the Israelites are leaving Egypt we are told in Exodus 12:38, "Many other people went up with them."

Perhaps these were fellow slaves, perhaps hired workers from outside of Egypt, or perhaps even some were Egyptian.

Whatever the case there are people travelling with God's people who cannot look back in their family tree and find Abraham.

Which raises a question about what to do with these people especially when it comes to the celebration and worship that God commands.

The LORD gives instructions about this situation in **12:43-51**.

At first it seems like all of these people are completely barred from eating the Passover meal.

But the LORD makes an exception in verse 44 and verse 48.

A foreigner whether a slave or someone voluntarily choosing to live in the land can participate if they undergo circumcision.

Look again at the end of **verse 48 to 49**.

Access to celebrate and worship the LORD for His saving works is granted to all by the same manner which is the sign of God's covenant (promise) with Abraham.

DNA is not the issue, instead what matters is believing what God says about being in relationship with Him.

[The Bible shows us this time and again. Just look sometime at the genealogy of Jesus. Tamar is likely a Canaanite, Rahab a resident of Jericho escaped destruction by choosing Israel's side, and Ruth who was from Moab clung to her mother-in-law and to the LORD. This becomes incredibly plain as Jesus commissions His disciples to "make disciples all nations".]

So we see in the Scriptures that in one sense the way to enjoy a relationship with God is open to all, but in another sense the way very narrow.

The people of God can and should be multi-ethnic but they are not multi-theological.

I am disturbed to the depths of my soul when I hear of so called Christian leaders endorsing pagan rituals in the church as a means of honouring cultural traditions.

Of course there are things in every culture that have no part in religious ceremony (Food and drink), but please understand that it is impossible to ‘Christianize’ idolatry.

[To be a part of God’s people means to turn away from false gods and believe what the God of the Bible says. No one is turned away based on their gender, skin colour, language, economic status, or anything inherent in their family tree. Belonging to God completely depends upon true and genuine faith. Here is a second thing made clear in this text...]

**Point #2 – God’s people are set apart.**

Believers must see themselves as belonging to the LORD and, therefore, distinct from unbelievers.

Again the LORD speaks to Moses in 13:1-2.

‘Consecrate’ translates a Hebrew word which means to ‘make holy’ and the word holy means to set something apart for the particular purposes of God.

God applies this idea of being ‘set apart’ to the firstborn sons of Israel.

I’m inclined to agree with commentators who say that the firstborn here are intended to represent the nation as a whole.

This seems clear from **Exodus 4:22**. Israel there is a clear reference to the whole nation and the LORD refers to the whole nations as His ‘firstborn’.

So I idea of asking His people to go through the exercise of setting apart their firstborn sons to the Lord is a constant reminder that Israel as a whole is to be set apart for God.

They are to be set apart for the service of God in worship.

That is made clear in Numbers 3 & 8 where the Levites are ‘taken in place of all the firstborn sons of Israel.’”

Why go through all of that? Why not just say from the start that the Levites have to serve at the tabernacle?

Because by having families dedicate their first born, every family in the nation has a constant reminder that they belong to God.

[Have you ever had to retrieve luggage off a conveyor belt at the airport? One of the challenges to that is that lots of people buy the same kind of luggage and even different brands of luggage often look similar to one another. That can make it hard to pick out the right bag and so something that people often do is they tie a colourful cloth or attach something very distinct to their luggage so that everyone will see who it belongs to.]

That is sort of the picture we have here.

The LORD is making it clear to His people and to those around them that they belong to Him.

That kind of grates against our human nature and many people struggle with that.

What do you mean I ‘belong to God’ I belong to myself.

People often see a relationship with God as having to give up our freedom to begrudgingly obey the LORD.

But the truth is when you are separated from God doing things your own way you are not free at all, you are a servant of evil.

To belong to God is to enter into eternal freedom and joy because only in our creator can we find satisfaction for our souls.

[As a church we have been working our way through the New City Catechism which is a series of questions and answers designs to teach us important biblical truth. Question #1 from that Catechism is, “What is our only hope in life and death?” Do you remember the shorter answer to that question? It’s “That we are not our own but belong to God.” Can you say clearly in your heart and mind that you belong to God? What is distinctly Christian in your life? As we wrestle with that question let’s turn our attention to verses 3-10 of chapter 13 because there we learn what must shape our lives as God’s people. We find here that...]

**Point #3 – God’s people must know and apply God’s Word.**

A mind full of the letter of God’s law may have little impact on daily living and a mind that knows nothing of the LORD’s instructions will have no ability to act rightly. We need both.

*In verses 3-7 Moses speaks to the people about the need to remember the day they are leaving Egypt when they are settled in the Promised Land.*

It is a word of encouragement about what is to come. They are heading to a “land flowing with milk and honey” (5).

That is a way of saying there is going to be abundant pastures and produce in the Land.

It seems to me that we have a tendency to forget about God when we have an abundance of worldly things.

We can see that in our culture, people have so much stuff it blinds them to their need of the LORD.

So God establishes the Passover feast to be in the first month of every year so they have a constant reminder before them of what God has done.

They are not to forget the reason why they get to enjoy such a wonderful place to live.

*That is why we read this in verses 8.*

If you do something a few times in front of your children, they are likely to ask, “Why are you doing that?”

God expects Israelite children to ask that question about the Passover celebration and He is expecting parents to teach their children about what the LORD did to take Israel out of Egypt. That still happens today in Jewish homes (youngest child).

This is not supposed to become an inconsequential tradition where families just get together and eat and drink.

It is supposed to be a celebration that serves as a time of instruction.

Anyone who have ever tried to teach something to someone else knows that the act of teaching is also an act of learning.

An idea will never be clearer in our own minds then when we are able to clearly communicate that idea to someone else.

That is why it says what it does here in **verse 9**.

*In the years to come some of the people would take this instruction quite literally.*

They fashioned leather boxes and would carry in the boxes portions of God’s word.

Of course this would be easy to turn into empty ritual, but the illustration that the LORD is trying to get across is unmistakable.

Binding God’s word to your forehead highlights the importance of having the Lord’s instructions impressed upon on your mind which is how the Word ends up coming out of your mouth according to verse 9.

This instruction will also be like having “a sign on your hand”.

Because the hand often represents a person’s power/ability to do something it serves as a clear connection between the word of the LORD and what a person does.

[A couple of years ago I took a trip to the Canadian Historical Aircraft Association at the Windsor airport. In their hanger they have a Lancaster bomber from WWII that they are trying to restore. One of the tour guides was telling me how expensive it was to rebuild the engines for the plane and told me that a local auto mechanic volunteered to do it for free because he said, “An engine is an engine.” He proceeded to work on the engine and ended up making it far worse and even more expensive to fix. He thought he could do it his way and as it turns out he couldn’t.]

We know that is true for so much of life. You need to have the proper knowledge and apply that knowledge to produce the desired effect.

We typically don’t take our cars to the dentist, nor do we go to garage to have an appendix removed.

We all understand the need for knowledge and application in most of life, but for some reason many people seem to give that little regard when it comes to the Lord.

It is possible to sit through to hundreds, perhaps thousands of sermons and never apply any of it to your life.

It is possible to think of yourself as ‘spiritual’ deciding for yourself how you will worship and all the while you are cutting yourself off from God.

Christianity is not a make it up as you go religion, it is a life giving faith built upon the unchanging Word of God.

[Don’t base your life on what you think! Don’t make decisions based on how you feel in a particular moment! Base what you do on what you know of God’s word. Don’t allow the word of God to go in one ear and out the other, pray that the Spirit would impress it upon your heart and mind so that it might change your life for the glory of Christ. Now thankfully, there is one more lesson for us this morning. If we were to leave it here than we might conclude that belonging to God was all up to us. But that would put things in the wrong order. God’s people don’t belong to Him because of all the things they do, they do these things because they belong to Him. That becomes clear in what Moses says to the people in verses 11-16. He comes back to the subject of the firstborn in Israel and through that we can see that...]

**Point #4 – God’s people know their need of redemption.**

In order to belong to God and enjoy the blessings of a relationship with Him there must be a sacrifice on our behalf.

Again the people are told to look to the future (11-12).

When they get the land God has promised (I just love the certainty of how this is written) they are to “give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb.”

It’s clear here that the sacrifice of the first born is intended.

That is the “first offspring of EVERY womb” is to die.

All of the sudden that raises a major issue, what about the first born children?

The Bible is crystal clear on this point, God does not want, in fact He detests, human sacrifice.

So why ask for it here? Because it creates the need for redemption (13-15).

I find it fascinating that donkeys and firstborn sons are put right next to each other in verse 13.

Why do that? Because neither one is a permissible sacrifice although for different reasons.

The donkey was a domesticated and useful beast of burden but would later be classified as ‘unclean’ and not permitted to be offered.

Now if you wanted to keep that donkey you could ‘redeem’ it with an acceptable sacrifice.

Otherwise it says here that you have to break its neck once again putting death front and center for the people of God.

Then you have the mention of the sons and the enormous difference is that they must be redeemed.

The sacrifice or killing of the firstborn son becomes in this verse an unthinkable contradiction of God's command.

Why? Remember the firstborn sons here represents the nation as a whole.

Now how can God's people fail to redeem their children when God never fails to redeem all those that belong to Him by faith?

*When we look to the New Testament we see much more clearly why there is such an emphasis on the first born.*

The firstborn of Egypt give us a picture of what all of humanity deserves and we see in the firstborn of Israel redemption according to God's grace.

But it is not the blood of sheep and goats, it is not silver or gold that can redeem God's people from judgment.

No, it is the redeeming blood of God's One and Only Son.

Jesus is first born to Mary and Joseph in His humanity and in Colossians 1:15 Jesus is called "the firstborn over all creation." Which means He holds first place over all creation because according to His eternal Divine nature He brought all things into existence.

In His capacity as firstborn He is able to stand in our place as our representative and redeem us from our sin so that we might belong to God forever.

No one else can do that for you!

*Can you say that you belong to God this morning?*

Can you say with confidence that you are a part of God's people?

Do you belong to Him by faith? Do you know what it means to be set apart to the Lord? Is your being set apart to the Lord being made plain by your growing understanding and obedience to the Word of God? Do you know that all of this comes through the redeeming work of Christ?

I hope you do, because if you do then you know the joy of belonging to the people of God.