

**Occasion:** First Sunday after Christmas [C]

**Date:** 12-27-2009

**Text:** Exodus 13:1-3a, 11-15; Luke 2:22-40

**Title:** "The Highest Priced Gift"

### Introduction:

On February 28, 1983, the 251<sup>st</sup> and the final episode of M\*A\*S\*H aired on CBS, entitled, "Goodbye, Farewell, and Amen". The episode intended to show the effects of the War on certain personnel of the unit.

During the final days of the Korean War, Capt. Hawkeye Pierce was sent to a mental hospital for treatment by Dr. Sidney Freedman. Gradually, Freedman leads Pierce to recall the events that led to his breakdown.

Pierce's memories of what led to his breakdown had become repressed, and as he and Freedman draw them forth, Pierce at first remembers the details inaccurately. In his first recollection, he was on a bus, riding back to the 4077th after a day of drinking and partying at the beaches of Incheon. He called for a bottle of whiskey to be passed back to someone who "can't wait"; later, he is able to more accurately recall this person was a wounded soldier, that the item for which Pierce had called was not whiskey, but plasma. The bus then picked up some South Korean refugees, followed by some wounded soldiers who brought news of an enemy patrol in the area. As Pierce relives the memories, he recalls that the bus pulled off the road and everyone was told to stay quiet so they would not be discovered by the enemy. One woman carried a live chicken that would not stop squawking, prompting Pierce to angrily admonish her to "keep that chicken quiet!" – after which the noise soon stopped.

This last detail causes Pierce to break down sobbing as he finally reveals the true ending of the story. When Hawkeye snapped at the woman, he had not told her to keep a chicken quiet, but in fact had insisted that she keep her baby quiet. Pierce now accurately recalls that the noise which had been endangering the lives of everyone on the bus was not really a chicken that would not stop squawking; in actuality, it had been the woman's baby who would not stop crying. After Pierce's imperative, and with all of her other, desperate efforts to quiet the baby having failed, the woman made the decision to smother her own child to silence its cries and thus protect the lives of the people on the bus.

After having insisted that she keep the baby quiet, Pierce had turned his attention away from the woman. Only when he later turned back to her did he realize what she had done, as he then saw the anguished mother silently sobbing as she held her now dead infant. Pierce, of course, had never intended for the mother to kill the baby; he had only wanted her to find a way to keep it quiet. Upon seeing what

had happened, he was so traumatized and so wracked with guilt over his order to the woman that he then repressed the memory of what occurred on the bus. Once he was back at camp, he attacked an anesthesiologist who was preparing a patient for surgery, accusing him of trying to smother the patient. This was the incident that caused Pierce to be committed to the mental hospital.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goodbye,\\_Farewell\\_and\\_Amen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goodbye,_Farewell_and_Amen)

### Setting:

When God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, He did so inflicting Ten Plagues upon the Egyptians. The Tenth Plague was the death of all the firstborn in Egypt, whether animal or human. The life of the firstborn in a household would be spared however, if a perfect year old lamb was slaughtered and its blood put upon the top and sides of the doorframe at the entry of the house. This event became known as the Passover, and was celebrated annually by the Israelites.

But based on that event, God also required the Israelites to sacrifice the firstborn male animal of every womb, and to present a sacrifice on behalf of every firstborn son. This was an object lesson for every Israelite family. Their freedom from slavery came at a cost. Every firstborn of Egypt was killed by the LORD. Only a sacrifice for each Israelite household prevented the LORD from taking the life of the firstborn of an Israelite family. Scripture tells us:

<sup>14</sup>"In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>15</sup>When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.'"

– Exodus 13:14-15

Every new generation experienced in a real way the price paid for the Israelites deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

### **I. JESUS FULFILLS THE DEMANDS OF THE LAW (FOR US):**

After the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem to make the appropriate sacrifice on behalf the baby Jesus. Luke tells us in his Gospel:

<sup>22</sup>When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup>and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

What we see right away in the life of Jesus, even as an infant, is that He Himself was under the Law of God. Immediately before the verses in the Gospel Lesson, Luke tells us:

<sup>21</sup>On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise Him, He was named Jesus, the name the angel had given Him before He had been conceived. - *Luke 2:21*

Obedient to the Covenant of circumcision and redeemed by the sacrifice prescribed by God for the firstborn male, Jesus was under the demands of the Law. And Jesus kept them perfectly, due to the faithfulness of His mother Mary and of Joseph.

These acts on behalf of the baby Jesus by Mary and Joseph may seem like small things in the larger course of life, but they are neither small nor trivial. All the demands of God's Law have a purpose. In circumcision, the divine-human Jesus was brought into the Covenant relationship God had established with Abraham (Genesis 17) and all his descendants. In the consecration of the firstborn son, Jesus' life was redeemed, as all the firstborn sons of every Israelite household had been since the time Israel was brought out of slavery in Egypt. In His Son Jesus, God provided the substitute Who would keep the righteous demands of God's Law perfectly on behalf of all mankind. From the earliest moments of His life, Jesus lived in obedience to the Law of God, keeping it for you and for me, so that by faith, we may receive the credit for Jesus' righteous life. Ironically, the life of the Redeemer of the world itself was redeemed by a sacrifice, in fulfillment of God's Law.

## **II. JESUS WOULD BE THE SACRIFICE OF REDEMPTION (FOR US):**

While Mary and Joseph fulfill the requirements of God's Law, a man to whom God had made a special promise approached them. Simeon, a righteous man, a man of genuine faith, had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the promised Messiah. On the day that Mary and Joseph went to the Temple in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit in Simeon moved him to go there as well. While there, Simeon goes up to Mary and Joseph, and takes the infant Jesus in his arms and praised God for providing the salvation He had promised. Then Simeon spoke to Mary:

"This Child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, <sup>35</sup>so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." - *Luke 2:34-35*

From the prophecies God had given in Scripture, Simeon knew God's plan for the Messiah. Jesus would confront sin and hypocrisy in the self-righteous, and Jesus would offer grace and mercy to "sinners", to prostitutes and tax-collectors. But most all, Jesus would be "the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world." Even though Mary and Joseph had just finished offering the sacrifice to redeem the life of

Jesus as the firstborn son, Jesus, as God's Son would be offered to redeem all mankind from the slavery of sin that everyone might be led to freedom and to the Promised Land of everlasting life. The great sacrifice that Jesus would make of His Own Self would one day cause Mary's soul to be pierced with grief and sorrow.

What we see here in these brief and few accounts about events that took place while Jesus is yet an infant, is that God had a plan for Jesus' life. Mary and Joseph no doubt did not know all that was planned for Jesus' life, yet they were a crucial part of that plan. Their total faithfulness to God's Law was a necessary part in God's plan being fulfilled in its entirety. Mary and Joseph received the greatest blessing, to be able to raise the Messiah in their household.

Nevertheless, every parent receives a great blessing, as every child is precious before God. Parents, how important it is for you to be faithful to the Word of God and all that He has prescribed for you. God has a plan for your child, your children. Your faithfulness is crucial if that plan is to be fulfilled in its entirety as God Wills. No doubt, you don't know the details of God's plan for your child, your children. But that doesn't matter, because God does. What is important right now is that you do your part and do it with faithfulness and devotion to the Lord. Raise your children by the Word of God. All children should be brought for Baptism. All children should be taught the Word of God, from the earliest years of their lives. Parents, get a children's Bible and read the Scriptures to your two year old, your three year old on their level and in small time frames. Teach them to pray, at meals, at night and anytime in any situation. Bring them to worship. Make sure they have an offering to put into the offering plate. Do your best all the years you have them to teach them and model to them an genuine Christian Faith, so that when they turn 18 years old, they will not only be an adult man or woman, but be an adult Christian man or an adult Christian woman, prepared to be a Christian husband or Christian wife, a Christian father or a Christian mother.

## **Conclusion:**

Today, as we continue in the Christmas season, we learn from the life of the infant Jesus. We see God's plan unfolding in Jesus' life through faithful parents, who obeyed the Law of God. As God fulfills His promise and sends His Son as the Messiah, Jesus comes as the great Substitute for all mankind. Jesus comes to live the righteous life under God's Law that every person should live. He did that so that we can receive the credit for His righteousness and stand holy and blameless before God through Faith. Jesus came to take upon Himself the guilt for the sin of the world, so that He could take the punishment against sin from God in our place. The cost of our redemption from sin and death is very high! Only Jesus could pay that price in His life and His death. In Christmas we celebrate the Greatest Gift, given with the Deepest Love, to pay the Highest Price, that Overflowing Grace might be received by All People through Faith, redeeming them for All time. AMEN