

THE PASSOVER LAMB

Text: Mark 14:12-25

Readings: Deut 16:1-8

Theme: Jesus turns the last Passover meal with his disciples into the remembrance of his death and in the Lord's Supper.

Purpose: To explain and apply the meaning of the Lord's Supper by looking back to the Passover.

Some of the happiest and most memorable occasions for family members and friends are enjoyed over meals: a Christmas dinner with the extended family, or birthday celebrations, or going out to a restaurant for lunch or dinner to celebrate an important anniversary.

Or you invite friends over to your home for dinner, or you go to their home, and you enjoy each others company and conversation. There is something special about sharing a meal together.

Jewish families had a number of special meals they shared together. One of these was the Passover. This meal recalled the night they left Egypt. When the Angel of Death saw the blood of a lamb on the doorframe of a house of a home of the people of Israel he passed over that home, thus sparing the firstborn son of that family. God commanded the Jews to celebrate this once every year.

Jesus had celebrated the Passover with his family for 30 years and with his disciples for the past two years. This Passover, he knew, would be the last meal he would have with his disciples before his death. This was to be his last Passover supper and he changed it into the Lord's Supper. Jesus instituted this to help us remember his death and to feed our faith.

We will look at *the Passover* itself and then consider *how* Jesus would die and *why*.

1. THE PASSOVER was the most important of the Jewish festivals.

In the time of Jesus every Jew who lived within a 20 km radius of the city was bound by law to attend the celebration. However, every Jew, in every part of the known world, wanted to go to Jerusalem at least once to celebrate the Passover there. Even today, when Jews throughout the world celebrate this, they pray that the next one might be in Jerusalem. During the time of Jesus time the population of the city swelled to vast numbers during the Passover, as much as 2.5 million.

Mark tells us that it was the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread (v 12). The feast lasted for seven days. A lamb would be sacrificed on the first day. A representative of each household would take their lamb or goat to the temple as a sacrificial offering. The priest would kill it and then the animal would be taken home to be cooked & eaten.

Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem so they could prepare the Passover meal. He told them to follow a man carrying a jar of water; they would notice him because *women* carried water in jars; if a man was going to carry water he would do that in a water skin. So this man would stand out. They were to follow him to the house he went to and then speak to the owner of the house about the guest room. Jesus must have prearranged with the owner the use of this room.

These arrangements meant that none of the disciples, except Peter and John, knew where they would celebrate the Passover until they arrived at the house. It is very likely that Jesus arranged it like this deliberately. It meant that Judas could not inform the chief priests where he was until Jesus had had time to tell his disciples all he wanted to pass on to them. Jesus did not want to be interrupted during this last meal.

The better homes in Jerusalem had two rooms - one above the other. The upper room was reached by an outside stairway. It was "furnished and ready" (v 15) which probably meant that it was supplied with couches, rugs and towels.

Peter and John made their preparations as Jesus had asked. Then, "when evening came, Jesus arrived with the twelve" and they settled down for the meal (v 17).

2. During the meal Jesus explained **HOW HIS DEATH** would come about. He said; "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me - one who is eating with me."

This came to the disciples as a bolt out of the blue! They knew the authorities hated Jesus and they suspected that they were out to get him; but they did not expect a traitor in their own ranks!

What's more, this person was someone *eating the meal* with them. In that culture eating with another was a sign of close fellowship and to insult or betray your host or guest with whom you had eaten was a great offence.

Each of the disciples wondered who it might be, and each one asked him, "Surely not I?" In response to their questions Jesus confirmed that it *was* one of the twelve but he did not identify *which one*.

But he did say something about this man: Verse 21, "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man. It would be better for him if he had not been born."

These words of Jesus show us that God was working in this situation and that the Holy Spirit had "written about him" in the Scriptures. His death had been predicted in the prophets and the psalms. Psalm 41 verse 9 foretold his betrayal by a friend; "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

The death of Jesus did not happen by accident but it was rather part of God's purpose and design. He had planned it like this. He was in control of all that happened. Nothing about this happened by chance; it was all part of God's sovereign will.

This was also true when God rescued his people out of Egypt. Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to release them. That too was part of God's plan and purpose so that he could lay his hand on Egypt in mighty acts of judgement and so that the people of Egypt would know that he was the Lord when they saw his powerful acts.

But Pharaoh was responsible for his own sin. The Lord hardened his heart, but Pharaoh also hardened his own heart. He rebelled against God; he refused to submit to God's will; he was stubborn and self-willed.

This was also true of Judas. He was fully responsible for his actions. God's purpose did not force him to act as he did; he made up his own mind, he hardened his heart against the Lord, he allowed bitterness and greed to control him, he chose to sin against God's commands, he decided freely to betray the Lord Jesus Christ. His sin was his own responsibility.

And that sin carried an enormous price: "Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (v 21). Judas betrayed God's own Son and handed him over to death. He allowed himself to be drawn into temptation and to fall into this terrible sin.

This is a solemn warning for us. You may grow up in a Christian home, know the Bible, come to church regularly, associate closely with Christians, and yet not be a Christian, not be converted. You can enjoy all these privileges and in the end reject them all! The writer of Hebrews warns us against falling away. If you do you are "crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace" (Heb 6:6).

Take solemn note of what Judas did and resolve that you will never, ever turn away from the Lord Jesus.

3. Jesus told his disciples *how* he would die but he also explained **WHY HE WOULD DIE**.

a. He took bread and gave it to them saying, "Take it; this is my body" (v 22).

i. In the Jewish Passover meal those taking part would eat unleavened bread - bread made without yeast. It was flat and dry like our crackers today. The Jews call it "matzah".

Early in the celebration one of the sons in the family would ask about the meaning of all this. Then the father would explain about the Passover lamb and how the people had to hurry to leave Egypt and that they did not have time to let the bread rise.

Jesus told his disciples that this bread symbolised his body; "this is my body". Of course, he did not mean that the bread was *actually* his body; after all, he was standing there right in front of them. Rather he meant that this bread *represented* his body. It was *a symbol* of his body and of his death. It was a sign of what he was about to do; it was a picture of his suffering and death.

b. "Then he took the cup" (v 23).

The Jewish celebration of the Passover had developed into a set pattern of prayers, readings, and various foods. There were four cups in the celebration and the one Jesus took here was probably the third cup, the cup of Hallel, or praise.

Jesus referred to it as "my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many" (v 24). He looked back to the sacrifices of animals in the old covenant. When the Lord established his covenant with Israel at Mt Sinai Moses took blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you." (Ex 24:8). By that blood the Lord established a relationship between himself and his people; he would be their God, they would be his people.

But that blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, nor could the blood of the Passover lamb. The blood of those sacrifices pointed forward to Jesus and his death and to his blood. This cup represented his blood of the New Covenant. He was the fulfilment of everything the Old Covenant anticipated.

His blood represented his life which he gave up for all who believe in him - for you, if you believe, for me. It shows us that Jesus died in the place of all his people. He died to take our punishment on himself. He died instead of us.

This is why Jesus told his disciples to eat the bread and drink the wine as a remembrance of him, and he wants us to do this too. He knows how forgetful we are. We so easily lose sight of the things that are important. We become preoccupied with other matters.

The regular celebration of the Lord's Supper reminds us of the heart and core of our faith, which is the death of Jesus on the cross. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper this is what remember. We look back to what he did in his death and we remember that is was for all who believe in him.

This is crucial: the Lord's Supper is for believers, not for unbelievers; it is for those who have a sincere faith, for those who are born again, for those who know their own sin and have confessed it to God and know they are forgiven because Jesus died for their sin.

The only way you can benefit from the Lord's Supper is through faith in the death of Jesus for you. When you come with faith the Lord's Supper feeds you. Just as physical bread feeds and strengthens your physical body, so the bread of the Lord's Supper feeds and strengthens your soul – it sustains your faith and helps it to grow.

Meal times are good times of fellowship with our friends and family; they are times of sharing and encouragement.

The Lord's Supper is a time of communion with Christ and of fellowship with each other. Here we look back and remember the death of Jesus on the cross and how his death has given us life.

But we also look forward. Jesus pointed his disciples forward to the future. Verse 25; "I tell you the truth, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew with you in the kingdom of God."

Jesus was looking ahead; after his death he would rise again and would ascend into heaven to rule and reign over the whole world and to extend his kingdom.

But one day he will come again. These words he spoke at that Last Supper anticipate his coming. They look ahead to the time when he will return and we will be raised and will share a great banquet in heaven with our triune God and the great multitude of believers who have trusted in God all through the ages. "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Rev 19:9).

This Lord's Supper has its roots in the Old Testament Passover, but it anticipates the great feast in heaven that is coming: "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

Amen