

The First Lord's Supper

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[0 : 0 0] holidays that are and when I say public holidays I don't mean necessarily the kind you get off work but that there is a special celebration of one kind or another. New Year's Day, then Burns Night, then Valentine's Day, then Mother's Day, then this day, then that day, then the next day until we get to Halloween, then Guy Fawkes Day, then Black Friday, then Christmas Day, then Hogmanay. There used to be only one or two big events a year but now they come along every couple of weeks. Perhaps it's just an excuse for card shops to sell more of their products or for Amazon to double its sales but I'm sure that I'm not the only one to have noticed the multiplication of special days in our calendar.

For the Jews of Jesus' Day there were also many special days but of them all the most important was the time of Passover. Strictly speaking the Passover was one day and the whole time surrounding it was called the Feast of Unleavened Bread where the Israelites were not permitted to have anything baked with yeast in their house. When we speak of Christmas time we're not just thinking about Christmas Day but the whole period surrounding it. This then was the most special day of the year for righteous Jews Passover day because it reminded them of what had happened over a thousand years before when God had liberated them from their slavery in Egypt and built them into a nation.

The Passover is still the single most important festival in Judaism and it plays a central role in what it means to be Jewish. That's why it was so difficult for the Israeli authorities to enforce a lockdown in Israel over Passover time. It speaks of the salvation of Israel because the angel of wrath passed over the houses of the Jews in Egypt. The blood of sacrificed lambs you will remember had been painted on the doorposts and the lintels of the houses and when the angel saw the blood he passed over that house. The Passover reminded God's people that in the blood of the sacrificed lamb lay their salvation from death and their redemption from slavery.

And this is where we are today in Matthew 26 verses 17 through 30. Hundreds of thousands of Jews from all over the known world were converging upon Jerusalem to celebrate that central festival of the Jewish year. And it's here and now Jesus is making preparation for the observance of the Jewish festival. But this will be his last Passover. For as we know in just a few hours from this point he will be betrayed. He will be crucified.

Have you ever heard of Jesus being called the Paschal Lamb? The Paschal Lamb? I guess it's a title used more in Anglicanism than in Presbyterianism. But this word Paschal is taken directly from the Greek word for Passover, Pascha. Jesus is the New Testament Paschal Passover Lamb through whose blood shed on the cross His people are saved from death. Here in these verses, Matthew 26, 17 through 30, Jesus is celebrating the Passover. But all the while he is aware that he is the New Testament Passover Lamb whose death will mean life for the people of God.

[4 : 1 5] So what we have then here in Matthew 26, 17 through 30 is a theme which has been running all the way through the book of Matthew. The continuity of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah who fulfills all the laws of the Old Testament and the discontinuity of Jesus as the Savior of the world who in his sacrifice as the Lamb of God builds a new people who have been redeemed from their sin and saved from death.

It is not so much that Jesus' actions here in Matthew 26 point back to the first Passover in Exodus, but that the first Passover in Exodus points forwards to Jesus' actions here in Matthew 26.

It is here, almost at the end of his public ministry, the central message of the Bible is proclaimed, demonstrated, and in that we triumph and have joy.

And so with this in mind, that Jesus is the New Testament Passover Lamb, or as John would proclaim him, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, we proceed this morning to consider four aspects of our passage.

First, the preparation of the New Testament Passover from verses 17 through 19. Then, the process of the New Testament Passover from verses 20 through 25.

[5 : 55] Then, the picture of the New Testament Passover from verses 26 to 28. And lastly, the push for the New Testament Passover in verses 29 and 30.

Of what relevance is this to us here in Glasgow City Free Church today? Well, much in every way, not the least being that because Jesus did all these things, our hearts are filled with the grace of the gospel, the delight of knowing God, and the beauty of Christian salvation.

First of all, then, here we have the preparation of the New Testament Passover. The preparation of the New Testament Passover in verses 17 through 19.

Celebrating the Passover was an intensely family occasion. It celebrated and cemented family relationships.

And so, it was not uncommon for a large extended Jewish family to celebrate the Passover together with senior members officiating. That's why, of course, the Israelis had such difficulty over this coronavirus crisis, locking down, because people wanted to celebrate the Passover as families.

[7 : 21] And Jesus here, by making arrangements for the Passover to be celebrated with his disciples, is doing something quite amazing. He is treating them as his family.

They, and not Mary or his physical brothers, are his family. This will be a time for him to cement and celebrate his new relationship with them.

The New Testament Passover celebrates new relationships. Not necessarily physical, but most definitely spiritual. As disciples of Jesus Christ gather together to celebrate him and to rejoice in their participation with him, they're filled with joy.

We are fellow disciples of Jesus Christ. We are brothers and sisters. We are the family of the Lord, and Jesus wants us to celebrate the New Testament Passover together.

It's not clear whether Jesus was just a very careful planner, or whether he used his deep spiritual insight when it came to the matter of locating a certain man who would let him use a certain room in his house for the celebration of the Passover.

[8 : 40] We really don't know. According to church tradition, this was the house of John Mark, who would later go on to become a disciple of Paul and Barnabas, and who was the first cousin of the Apostle Peter.

But again, we don't really know. The important thing to notice is both that Jesus wanted to celebrate the Passover with his disciples, thereby making them his family and cementing his closeness with them, that as his death approached, there was no one else he would rather spend time with than Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Nathaniel, Thaddeus, and so on.

But the other important thing to notice is what Jesus says in verse 18. He says, My appointed time is near. My appointed time is near. Just like a heavily pregnant woman knows when her time is close because she fails to begin the contractions.

So Jesus knows that his time, not of his birth, but of his death, is close. The time is near, he says.

The time of his suffering and passion. That to which his life has been leading inexorably from its beginning. He was lovingly placed in a cradle by his mother at birth.

[10 : 13] He will be spitefully nailed to a cross by his enemies at death. But from beginning to end, make no mistake, it has all been headed toward this point.

The time is near when God's people shall be saved from their sins, redeemed from death by the sacrifice of the New Testament paschal lamb.

See the great self-control of Jesus. That though he knew what was to happen, he embraced it.

Because in embracing it, he was embracing us with his grace and his love. How great the love of our New Testament paschal lamb.

That he, even though he knows his time is near, he goes on. And through the upper room, shows his love to his disciples in this way.

[11 : 18] We have the preparation of the Passover. Second, from verses 20 through 25, we have the process of the New Testament paschal lamb.

The process of the New Testament paschal lamb. There's a level upon which we look at Judas Iscariot, not with hate really, but with pity. He's a pathetic limpet of a man.

He's a jelly-like figure. But even now, Jesus is giving him an opportunity to turn away from the betrayal. But will he take it?

As all the disciples gathered round that table in the upper room, celebrating the Passover, Jesus says to them, I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.

Shock and sadness ripped through the gathered disciples, and one by one they began to say, surely not I, Lord. Each of them knew their inner propensity toward weakness, and so their question was not, is it him?

[12 : 24] But is it I? They're all sad, but one of them is sad for a different reason. Judas knows he's being caught out, and that Jesus knows about the deal that he's made with the chief priests and the 30 pieces of silver.

Jesus says, the one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The action of sharing dips was very normal in the Israel of Jesus' day.

Each person would dip a piece of bread into the various dips and sauces. And by saying what he said, Jesus is heightening the betrayal.

The man who will betray him is so close to him that they have shared a meal together, and this remains today the highest form of Middle Eastern hospitality and friendship, that two people should share a meal together.

The truth is that probably all the disciples had dipped their hands into the bowls from which Jesus was eating, but for one of them, what Jesus said caused great sadness.

[13 : 44] That one was Judas. For even as he said to Jesus, just like the other said, said, surely not I, Rabbi, Jesus said to him, yes, it is as you say.

From Judas' own mouth came his own guilt and sin. But how awful the verdict. Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man.

It would be better for him had he never been born. But all those gathered around that table, the death of the New Testament Passover lamb would bring great blessing.

But not for Judas. It was no blessing but a curse. No blessing but a woe because he had made a deal with the devil.

And yet by saying what he did, Jesus is still making room for Judas to repent and to turn away from his betrayal. But will he will he grasp the opportunity Jesus is giving him to avoid the most terrible fate known to man?

[15 : 14] Well, the point is this. Just as Scripture had foretold the Messiah shall be betrayed by one of his closest friends. In Psalm 41, verse 9, we read of the suffering of the Messiah.

Even my closest friend whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. By what means shall the New Testament sacrificial lamb be offered?

Answer, the process shall be initiated by someone very close to him. Someone who was one of his closest friends.

Someone who will betray him. There is a traitor in the camp. It is one thing to die on the cross. It is quite another thing to die there because one of your closest friends who you had entrusted your life to has betrayed you.

Imagine the emotional impact of that betrayal on Jesus himself. The wheels have now been set in motion as we learned last week.

[16 : 29] Judas has identified himself as the betrayer to Jesus even if what has been said has gone over the heads of the other disciples. Jesus will be betrayed by one of his closest friends.

The New Testament lamb shall be placed and sacrificed on the cross not because the Egyptians placed him there but because one of his own people placed him there.

Ah Judas do you not know that you're doomed? Yes it's been written about you for millennia in the scriptures the scriptures you yourself learned as a child.

You are the one through whom the Messiah shall be handed over to the Romans to be crucified. You have set in motion the sacrifice of the great New Testament Passover lamb and for that you will pay.

But even now at this late stage see the great compassion of Jesus in giving Judas one last opportunity to repent and to turn away from his betrayal.

[17 : 40] See the expression in Jesus' eyes as he looks at Judas. Hear the question in his voice as he speaks to Judas see it hear it then pity Judas no more for he has played his devilish part and he face to face is betraying Jesus to the death of the cross.

Ah the fate of Judas is terrifying but how great the compassion of Jesus. this then is the process of the New Testament Passover a process which given Jesus knowledge of Judas actions and his reference in verse 21 to the son of man going just as it is written about him we're aware he is in complete control of this and yet it's a process which will lead to his betrayal his torture and crucifixion.

Blood will be shed but blood willingly will be shed. He will willingly shed it for us so that our sins can be forgiven and we can be redeemed from death.

Third from verse 26 through 28 we have the picture of the New Testament Passover the picture of the New Testament Passover. I could wish we had more time to deal with this first New Testament Passover meal what we have come to call the communion the Lord's Supper the Eucharist there's a sense in which if this was the only part of the Bible you possessed if this was the only passage in all of scripture that you had access to you had enough because in pictorial form here Jesus reveals his mission and offers to his servants the benefits of his sacrificial death on the cross as the great New Testament Passover lamb he takes bread and he breaks it and he gives it to his disciples and having given thanks he tells them to eat it take eat he says to them this is my body following in the tradition of John

Calvin we believe that the action of taking and eating is more than a mere picture or a mere symbol but nevertheless Jesus commands his people gathered round that first Lord's table to take and eat this is my body the Latin translation of the New Testament the so-called Vulgate renders this phrase this is my body with the Latin words hoc est corpus meum hoc est corpus meum this is my body in the medieval Roman church the priest would turn his back to the congregation during the celebration of the mass and recite these words hoc est corpus meum the congregation behind him very few of whom could speak any Latin at all heard the priest mumble words which sounded to them like hocus pocus and then turned to tell them that the bread that he had lifted up in the air had now been transformed into the very body of Christ thus we have the origin of the magical term hocus pocus when a magician turns one thing into another thing without a doubt there is much mystery surrounding the elements of the

[21 : 21] Lord's Supper we most certainly do not believe that the bread and the wine become the physical body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ nor do we believe that they are naked and bear symbols of the body and blood of Jesus there is mystery here and we should be content with that Jesus said this is my body this is my blood in what sense it is very mysterious and yet we know that the totality of it is a picture of the New Testament Passover Passover where our Lord Jesus offered his body on the cross for us and he shed his blood for us there rather than arguing about the matter in which it can be said that Jesus is present in the bread and the wine we would be better served by listening to the summary Jesus gives in verse 28 this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins just like in the Old

Testament Passover the blood of lambs was painted on the doorposts on lintels of the houses of the Israelites now it's here in a cup each of God's people must drink it's in drinking the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ not literally you understand that we share in the benefits of salvation and redemption rather than arguing about the manner in which it can be said that Christ Jesus is present in the blood and the wine Christians would be better served understanding what these elements point to the forgiveness of sins that's why Jesus poured out his blood upon the cross and offered his body as our sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins my sins are in that cup and your sins are there too and he poured out his blood so that all our sins could be taken away his blood blots them out of the book of God's reckoning so do you recognize the continuity discontinuity imagery here in Matthew 26 between the Old

Testament Passover and the New Testament communion you now see why four times a year in Glasgow City Free Church we eat bread and drink wine it is to celebrate the greatest of all festivals to participate in the picture of the Lamb of God being sacrificed to take away the sins of the world whose blood is in that cup it's Jesus blood whose sins has he taken away yours and then lastly this morning from verses 29 through 30 we have the push for the New Testament Passover the push for the New Testament Passover I want to close this morning by finally noticing the determination of Jesus to go from this upper room and to embrace the fate which awaited him he is in complete control of everything that would befall him he's in control of the betrayal and of the trial the cross and the resurrection and yet even though he knew he was giving his body and pouring out his blood even though he knew the terrifying weight of sin that he was to endure walked to the cross and he willingly bore that shame because in that lies our salvation our forgiveness and our redemption he says to his disciples in verse 29

I tell you I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until the day when I drink it anew with you in my father's kingdom now whatever else this verse means and it does mean much it means this Jesus knew that this was to be the last meal he would sit down to eat with his disciples in this life for three years they had eaten together as a family they had enjoyed drinking wine together but tonight will be the last until they eat and drink together in the kingdom of God well has this been called the last supper not so much because it was Jesus last supper but because it was the last time he would drink wine with them until the consummated kingdom of heaven Jesus he knew just like a condemned man is asked what he would like to eat as the last meal before his execution so Jesus chose to eat a

Passover meal with his disciples and yet is there not in what Jesus says here a note of hope that though Jesus may not drink wine with his disciples here in this life he will drink it in the kingdom of heaven that there together gathered around the banqueting table of the Messiah they will eat and drink together once more that's why at our communion table as well as there being a focus on the past actions of Jesus dying for our sins we also want to focus on the forward actions of Jesus in preparing for us a heavenly banquet the point is this even just a few hours before his death Jesus has fully set his heart and mind on dying for his people he is resolute his eyes are set like flint toward

[27 : 41] Calvary and then we read they sung a hymn literally they psalmed together like every other Jewish family they concluded the Passover meal by singing from the Hallel section of the Psalms probably Psalm 118 which speaks of the Messiah giving himself for his people and in so doing triumphing over his enemies here we have a Jesus who has consecrated himself to a task and has now committed himself to it Jesus who will go from this upper room to be sacrificed on the cross as the New Testament Passover lamb who will take away the sins of the world our passage contains so much but it all points to Jesus as our pastoral lamb now what will you do with all you have learned today shall you by faith engage with the grace of the

Christ who poured out his blood for the forgiveness of many the lamb who gave his body for us shall by faith the next time God willing we have physical communion with each other you take and you eat and you drink not just the bread and the wine but today will you take Jesus Christ as your Lord and your saviour will you have him as your Passover lamb let us pray Lord we thank you for the richness of your word but it's not the word we worship it's Jesus we worship you for Jesus as the great new testament Passover lamb the lamb to which all the lambs slain in the old testament point Jesus who on the cross is pouring out his blood for the forgiveness of the sins of many father we pray for faith to believe these things we pray that we ourselves would place our faith and trust in the

Lord Jesus Christ that we would take and eat of his body even now by faith in our hearts and in our homes that Jesus would be to us our sacrificed lamb who takes away our sin and gives us new life in Jesus name we pray these things Amen heaven