

Maundy Thursday

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 April 2023

Preacher: Dean Baldwin

[0:00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in your sight. O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. In the short time that we have together this evening, I want to take a brief look at each of tonight's readings to see both what God has done and how his people have responded.

I invite you to consider with me how we should, in light of these passages, prepare ourselves to have our feet washed or to wash one another's feet, and also how we should prepare our hearts to participate in the Lord's Supper.

When God made his covenant with Abraham, he warned Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt, but that God would redeem them.

In our reading from Exodus 12 this evening, we heard of God's institution of the Passover festival. This was to be a ritual that the people of Israel, God's chosen people, were to celebrate forever. God was preparing to fulfill his promise to Abraham to bring his descendants out of bondage and into the promised land.

[1:19] In the chronology of the book of Exodus, God instructs his people on how they are to celebrate the Passover, the perpetual memorial of their redemption, before their redemption actually takes place.

That's a bit like putting the cart before the horse for us. It's counterintuitive to our way of doing things. It might be a bit like preparing your wedding anniversaries in elaborate detail before your wedding day.

Nevertheless, we read in chapter 12 about how the Israelites are instructed to celebrate their exodus from Egypt in light of what God is about to do.

They are to celebrate the Passover during both the inaugural days leading up to their redemption from Egypt, as well as forever afterward.

Three times in chapter 12, God reiterates that the celebration of the Passover is to be a statute forever. That's verses 14, 17, and 24.

[2:28] But what was the Passover exactly? In Exodus chapter 11, God warned Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron that a tenth plague would be coming to the land of Egypt.

God had already demonstrated his great power to save his people along with his grace and mercy by sending nine other plagues to the land of Egypt.

God had, through his servants Moses and Aaron, turned the Egyptians' water into blood, sent gnats, flies, frogs, destroyed their livestock, gave them boils, sent hail, locusts, and darkness upon the land.

But Pharaoh refused to listen. Finally, God promised to send a tenth plague in which he himself would pass through the land of Egypt, striking firstborn males of both man and beast.

There are three lessons from the Passover which I would invite you to keep in mind as we examine the other passages this evening. Firstly, I want to point out God's repeated offer of mercy to Pharaoh and to the people of Egypt.

[3:49] Recall the analogy that Jesus once made about a king preparing to go to war with an enemy that had a much larger army. Jesus says that if that king were to know that he couldn't defeat an enemy that vastly outnumbered him, he would be wise if he sent a delegation of peace before that king came.

Throughout the course of the first nine plagues, Pharaoh had multiple opportunities to negotiate peace with the God of Israel, but he refused.

While God gave this ample time to Pharaoh to make peace, we see Pharaoh's stubborn pride and complete obstinance in the face of a God far more powerful than himself and far more powerful than

all the gods of Egypt.

This should be a warning to us of the potential for pride in the human heart and within our own hearts. The consequences of Pharaoh's pride led to his personal destruction and to total economic and military destruction of his nation.

Pharaoh saw with his own eyes the great deeds that the God of Israel had done, yet he refused to submit to God's rule in his heart.

[5 : 20] We'll see that this is a theme that reoccurs in each of our readings. The second lesson from the Passover is that neither Moses and Aaron, nor Israel as a nation, nor any of the Hebrew people, did anything to deserve their redemption, nor to bring it about.

On the basis of his covenant promise to Abraham, and by his mighty power and outstretched arm, God brought his people out of the land of Egypt.

The Passover and Exodus may be the foundational event of the people of Israel, but this was no slave rebellion. This was no underdog uprising.

From start to finish, the Israelites did not lift a finger, nor was Israel liberated because of their obedience and piety.

In fact, even Israel's obedience to God, their faith in him, and their faithfulness to him were all questionable at best. But God, because of his tender mercy and compassion and his covenant faithfulness, rescued them.

[6 : 38] Finally, as we look ahead, I would like us to remember that God promised that he would make a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians.

He did this through each of the previous plagues. He also promised to do this in the Passover. God commanded the Israelites to kill a firstborn lamb without blemish, and with the blood of this animal, to mark the lintel and doorposts of their dwellings.

God promised, when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you when I strike the land of Egypt.

Now, after the Passover, Israel came out of the land of Egypt and went off to the promised land and lived happily ever after. Except that they didn't.

Actually, it didn't take long for things to go horribly wrong. Just a few months after leaving Egypt, the scriptures tell us that Israel came to Mount Sinai, where despite all that God had done for them and all that he had revealed to them about himself and his love and his covenant faithfulness, Israel fell into idolatry.

[7 : 58] Israel's pattern of disobedience and rebellion in contrast to God's constant provision and mercy is the theme of Psalm 78, a portion of which we read during our second reading tonight.

One portion from that psalm that we didn't get to tonight describes Israel in this way. They did not keep the covenant of God and would not walk in his law, but they forgot what he had done and the wonderful works that he had shown them.

Marvelous things he did in the sight of our forefathers, in the land of Egypt, even in the land of Zoan. If you read Psalm 78 in its entirety, and I'd encourage you to do that, it can be viewed as a concise summary of Israel's relationship with God.

Throughout the psalm, Israel oscillates back and forth between covenant with God, on the one hand, to faithfulness, then, on the other hand, to faithlessness, breaking the covenant, and forgetting God's marvelous works.

Meanwhile, God is portrayed in the psalm as being present in Israel, leading Israel, and providing for them.

[9 : 29] Yet for all of this, the psalmist says, they sinned more against him, and provoked the Most High in the wilderness.

From Psalm 78, we get the idea that one of Israel's besetting sins is one of ingratitude. God has freed them from enslavement, from an evil tyrant.

He destroyed the Egyptian army without Israel needing to lift a finger. He led them through the desert with his very presence, and has even provided fresh, life-sustaining water for them from the rock in the wilderness.

And how do they respond? Yet for all of this, they sinned more against him, and provoked the Most High in the wilderness.

Israel repeatedly grumbles against God, and he miraculously meets their needs despite their grumbling.

[10:35] God's persistent provision, mercy, and forgiveness of Israel is summed up in some of the later verses of Psalm 78, verses 38 to 40.

But he was so merciful that he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Indeed, many times he turned his wrath away and would not permit his displeasure to arise, for he considered that they were but flesh, that they were even as the wind that passes away and comes not again.

I ask you, does Israel's stubborn obstinance remind you of anyone? As a nation, Israel's heart seems to be as rock-hard as the Pharaoh whom they were just liberated from.

The people of Israel, like Pharaoh, saw with their own eyes the great deeds that God had done. But for all this, they sinned yet more and did not believe in his wondrous works.

I invite you to turn now with me to your thoughts to the events that are memorialized tonight, Maundy Thursday. Jesus tonight washes his disciples' feet and institutes the feast of the new covenant, the Lord's Supper.

[12:13] I want to take a brief look at how our third and fourth readings together, the reading from 1 Corinthians 11 and the gospel from John chapter 13.

Now, personally, I would love to get into the many ways that the New Testament writers identify the Lord's Supper with the Passover, but there's just not time for that tonight.

Instead, let me summarize some of my presuppositions, namely my belief that based on Scripture, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the course of the Passover meal, he was instituting a rite for the church, a rite that, like the Passover, the church is to celebrate perpetually.

If Passover was to be the feast of the old covenant, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the feast of the new covenant. If Passover was a celebration of God liberating Israel from their enslavement in Egypt, the Lord's Supper is the celebration of God liberating mankind from their enslavement to sin.

We are told in the epistle reading tonight that Jesus Christ instituted the feast of the new covenant on the night when he was betrayed.

[13:36] The fact that Jesus knew he would be betrayed by his closest companions makes the events of Maundy Thursday all the more remarkable. Our gospel reading tells us that Jesus was well aware of his coming betrayal.

Verse 11 tells us that Jesus knew who was about to betray him. The devil, we are told in verse 2, had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him.

We are accustomed to thinking of Judas as the great betrayer, and the scriptures describe him in that way. But how could Judas, one of the twelve, betray Jesus?

Judas. The gospels give us no record of Judas' calling to become a disciple, at least not in the same way as they portray the callings of Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Nathaniel. Nevertheless, the gospel of Luke in particular lists Judas as one of the twelve early on. All of this, to me, implies that Judas had probably been with Jesus throughout most of his ministry.

[14:50] It is quite possible that the Lord's Supper was not even the first Passover meal that Judas would have shared with Jesus. Judas would have seen the miracles, heard Jesus' teaching, broken bread with him, and shared in fellowship with the Son of God.

But Judas, like Pharaoh and unbelieving Israel, saw the works of God in the person of Jesus, and yet his heart was hardened. I think it's easy to pick on Judas.

Judas is in many ways an easy target. But I don't want us to overlook the fact that Judas was not the only one who betrayed Jesus on Maundy Thursday.

Jesus knew full well of Judas' betrayal, but he also foretold the threefold denial done by Simon Peter. It was not only Judas and Peter, in fact, who forsook Jesus, but all of his disciples.

Furthermore, I would argue that Peter's denial of Jesus is equally as significant as that of Judas.

Did you catch that?

[16:08] Peter's denial of Jesus is equally as significant as that of Judas. The number three in biblical thought, the number of the Trinity, is a symbol of completeness.

According to the Bible, a testimony holds more weight than if it can be backed up by two or three witnesses. Three makes a complete testimony. More witnesses means a stronger case.

Jesus rose again after three days to signify that he had been completely dead. Why was it significant that Peter denied Jesus not once, but three times?

To show that he had completely and utterly disowned Jesus. Peter, along with James and John, was one of the three closest companions of Jesus, and he was the would-be foundation of the

church that Jesus had promised to build, and yet, he would deny on Maundy Thursday that he had ever known Jesus.

I believe that Peter represents the rest of the disciples. Therefore, we see that on the night memorializing Israel's redemption, the Passover feast, Jesus' closest companions acted exactly like the people of Israel who ate and drank from the hand of God in the desert.

[17 : 36] The disciples who had seen the power of God and had communed with the Messiah and who had been washed by his hand abandoned their Savior.

It was on this same bleak night that Jesus, knowing what was to come, got up from supper, stripped off his garments, and wearing only a towel, washed the feet of his betrayers.

This was love, care, and mercy that reveals the very character of God. God. This was the creator of the universe, stooping low, acting as a servant to his creation.

This was the same love that God had revealed to Israel over and over again, not only in the Passover, but in the way that he led them through the desert.

It has often been raised as a concern that the God of the Old Testament seems to contradict the man, Jesus, that we encounter in the New Testament. But I think that looking at God's repeated compassionate care and love expressed toward unworthy recipients, the people of Israel, Psalm 78 tells us that God gave to Israel the people who had betrayed him over and over the bread of heaven.

[19 : 07] Like the first Passover, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a rite and a statute for the church to observe, to commemorate our redemption, deliverance not from the hands of sinful men, but deliverance from sin itself and its effects.

Like the first Passover, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper before the work of redemption was accomplished. Like the first Passover, God passed through and among a people living in bondage and promised that Jesus' blood, the blood of a perfect, spotless, sinless lamb, would distinguish the redeemed from the condemned.

Those who believe and trust in Jesus' atoning death and glorious resurrection have their hearts marked by his blood just as the blood of the sacrificial Passover lamb marked the doorposts of Israel.

God has promised to see the blood and to pass over us to save us from judgment. The difference between Judas' betrayal and the betrayal of Peter is a difference only found in Peter's restoration. After Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter repented of his betrayal, cast himself upon Christ's mercy and was restored. There is nothing Peter nor any of the other disciples who had abandoned Jesus did to deserve his mercy.

[20 : 46] Peter was not restored because of his faithfulness, but because of God's great compassion on those who turned to him. Again, Psalm 78 recounts that at various times in Israel's history, they remembered that God was their rock and the Most High was their Redeemer.

When they returned to him, he restored them. Judas, had he been able to see the true character of God, could have been restored by the blood of Jesus the Lamb.

God and the Lord My goal tonight has been to share with you from the Scriptures the character of God as patient, compassionate, and powerful.

Pharaoh, Israel, Judas, Peter, and the other disciples all saw the great deeds that God had done. All were recipients of his love and mercy.

All were fed by the very hand of God. All had their feet washed by the hand of God. All of them betrayed God, ignored his mighty works.

[22 : 00] Pharaoh and Judas in their pride refused to submit to him. Peter and the other disciples may have betrayed God, but they repented and were restored by his blood.

Likewise, most of us, if we are honest, can say that we have seen the power and the compassion of God. If we haven't seen God's power to save, we can at least say that we have heard the testimonies of what he has done.

Whether you're hearing these things for the first time, the hundredth time, or the thousandth time, to those who have Christ's blood marking their hearts, God promises eternal life.

He knows our sin, he knows we are traitors, but he offers us the water of life and bread from heaven. To those who neglect his mercy and compassion, he promises judgment.

Do not harden your hearts like Pharaoh and Judas, but allow them to be softened by Christ Jesus' blood. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[23:12] Amen. Amen. Amen.