

The Passover

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[0:00] May the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be acceptable in my sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Let my people go. God, through Moses, has been displaying his mighty power with the ten plagues.

Pharaoh has been stubborn, half-hearted and bitter end, which is about to come. Before God forces Pharaoh to free his first born by taking Pharaoh's first born, we have this pause in the narrative where God ordains the feast of the Passover before the actual Passover actually happens.

Ritual interrupts narrating. The significance of this annual feast and the event it celebrates is highlighted by the fact that God re-organises Israel's entire calendar around Passover.

In the ancient Near East, all calendars were based on the cycle of nature, that the new year began with the new season of growth in nature.

Here, God focuses Israel's calendar not on the nature or creation, but on grace and redemption. Israel must count their days according to the mighty acts of God.

[1:46] The new year began in the month when God delivered his people from the bondage of Egypt. To remind them that their new life began when God passed over them as he passed through Egypt, God gave them this Passover celebration in the first month of their new calendar.

While Israel also celebrated the cycle of nature along with their pagan neighbours, God wanted to make sure that they never forgot that they owed their lives to the redemptive action of their God. Therefore, God gave them the very detailed instructions for the Passover feast that we heard this morning. As we heard, they focused primarily, but not solely, on a lamb.

On the tenth day of that first month, the head of each family was to select a lamb, or a goat, from the family's flock. It was essential that each family have access to a lamb, so if a family was too poor to spare a lamb, a neighbouring family was to share.

The head of the family was to consult with the cook to make sure there was enough lamb to go round the whole family. This lamb was to be a year old, totally perfect, non-blemished specimen, given special treatment until the fortieth day of their month.

[3:15] Each lamb was to be slaughtered at twilight on that day, the blood being caught and smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the houses where it was eaten. It had to be eaten under strict guidelines as well, roasted, not boiled, eaten on the same day with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast.

Whatever was left had to be burned to ashes by the morning. This rare was also to eat this feast in a hurry, like they were late going somewhere, which, of course, they were.

Cloaks tucked into their belts, sandals on their feet, staff in their hands, eat in haste. Now, I don't think it takes an Einstein to figure out the reasons for some of these directions.

The focus on the lamb was the divine foreshadowing of the lamb whose blood would take away the sins of the world. Therefore, it must be without blemish spot, absolutely perfect.

The lamb was roasted whole because that's how wandering shepherds prepared their lambs out in the world where God's wandering people would spend the next forty years.

[4:28] The bitter herbs were a perpetual reminder of Israel's bitter servitude in Egypt. The unleavened bread was a reminder of just how quick Israel had to leave Egypt after a four hundred year wait and before Pharaoh changed his mind.

The somewhat peculiar state of dress was also a pointer to the same direction. Remember how fast you had to move to save your lives. The central meaning of the lamb and all the accompanying details is found in the last words of verse 11.

The Lord's Passover. This feast and its annual celebration pointed to God and what he did that fateful night. On that same night I would pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both

people and animals.

And I would bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. That's what this whole struggle with Pharaoh was about. Who is God?

Who is sovereign? Who controls the life of Israel? Is it the gods of Egypt who seem to have prevailed for over four hundred years? Or is it God who has systematically demonstrated his power over those gods in the ten plagues?

[5:48] Ending with the ruination of the house of the God of Pharaoh. When God sends people free he gives Israel a sign to remind them for all time that he and he alone is their only saviour.

The blood on their doorposts. The blood of the lamb that marks them as being saved. It was a sign for them and apparently a sign for God.

When I see the blood I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. All the peculiar rules for the Passover feast were designed to remind Israel that God is their God and their saviour.

Who passed over them because of the blood of the lamb. Verse 14 tells them that they are to celebrate this sacramental feast for generations to come.

So that the coming generations do not forget their liberating God. Sadly, Israel did forget their God when they stopped celebrating Passover.

[6:55] That in turn led to the downfall, exile and new bondage of Israel. But that is a story for another day. Cleaning Passover is a uniquely Jewish feast but it points to several Christian applications.

Firstly, this passage shows us the centrality of worship for the maintenance of an historical community. And it demonstrates the importance of doing worship in the right way.

This festival for Israel was at the heart of the way they marked the time. The way they identified themselves and the way they related to their God. So it was important not only that they kept the festival but also that they kept it properly.

Every detail meaning something. The pandemic showed us that the importance of celebrate called worship. We can get by with online worship for a time.

But eventually the lack of face to face worship destroys the sense of continuity of our historical community. Voltaire once said, if you want to destroy Christianity, you must abolish Sunday.

[8:07] Thinking about the detailed instructions regarding the Passover feast, I wondered perhaps if there was a message to the way we worship today. Much of the church has embraced a casual, spontaneous, informal worship in the name of authenticity, which is laudable after all.

It is possible to dwell so much on rules and forms that worship is wrong of its heart. Also possible is the fact that formal ritualistic worship can become a substitute for real-life engagement in the great social issues of the day.

Perhaps we should think about God's harsh words through Isaiah about the kinds of feasts and fasts that made God angry because his people don't engage in care for the poor or for the oppressed.

Could it be we become slipshod in our efforts to be spontaneous? When Jesus said that we must worship in spirit and in truth, is he saying that spiritual worship has to be shaped by the truth revealed in Scripture?

Suggesting that given the importance of worship to our relationship with God, we should take great care how we do it. Secondly, I was intrigued by the way God rearranged the Jewish calendar so that the year began with Passover.

[9:29] God was saying, remember that your life began when I saved you from bondage. God was saying, I am the source of your life. God was saying, I am the source of your life. God was saying, I am the source of your life. How do we feel about that?

God was saying, what's the source of our life? Our family? Our culture? Our heritage? Our nation? Our own choice? Our own actions? Let's put it another way.

When did your life begin? At birth, when we became a teenager? An adult? When you got married? Had children? And you got that dream job?

There's a society wide tendency to think that we establish our life by the choices we make. You can be whoever you decide to be. Or are our lives established and grounded in God?

Only what God has done for us? Passover points for the latter. The third connection between Passover and the Lord's Supper is very clear.

[10 : 30] It was no accident that Jesus established the Eucharist at the Passover feast. He was very deliberately saying that God was doing in him what God did in Egypt all those years ago.

The New Testament called Jesus the spotless Lamb of God, whose blood marks us, sets us free, and cleanses us from all sin.

Because of that blood, God passes over the new Israel when he passes through the world to destroy those gods that have enslaved so many today. Every year they sacrifice that lamb, but Christ was sacrificed once and for all.

When he said it was finished, there was no longer any need for those sacrifices of the Old Testament. They were there as examples to point God's people to what was coming.

Once the real thing came, there was no need for the animal sacrifices. From this point forward, following the death of Jesus Christ, he said, do this and remember.

[11 : 37] So when you partake at the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, the Holy Communion, the Mass, whatever it's called, wherever you are celebrating it. When you take that bread and you take that wine, realize that you're not only looking back and remembering, but you are also recognizing and celebrating that you are no longer under the bondage of that sin.

And thank God for it. And they're the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.