

The Passover Takeover

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. Good morning, good morning. It's really nice to see you all here this morning. Did you know that Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius died later in life at a pretty good age in comfortable beds?

There were people that loved them in the room with them. When Jesus died, his situation was much different, wasn't it? He was abandoned by his friends.

It was a shameful death. He was young. He only had three years of ministry under his belt. And yet Christians look up at Jesus and we say, yep, that's the guy for me.

That's the guy I'm going to follow. And not only that, we take the most embarrassing point in his life, the most embarrassing part of his life, the most shameful, the cross, and we say, and that's going to be our symbol.

That's going to be the center of our faith. Now, what kind of sense does this make? Considering the options. Well, the early church, the first Christians, it made perfect sense to them.

[1 : 20] And in our passage this morning, we're going to see why. So let's get into it. Our text, the story before us happens in sort of three movements.

There's three sections. We'll look at them one by one. We'll look at the first section, which is verses 17 to 19. So if you open your Bible or a Bible app, that would be helpful.

So 17 to 19. So the disciples are asking Jesus, so where are we going to celebrate Passover? And Jesus says, look, I've got it sorted. I've got it covered. Go to a village. There's a guy. He's got a room.

It's going to be organized. It's no problem. Do you notice, though, just in those first couple of verses, that the word Passover is mentioned in everyone? Why is that?

It's not a mistake. Matthew is a very careful writer. He has a very tidy mind. And Matthew repeats Passover in these first few verses, this introduction to the rest of it, because he wants us to know what's about to go down is all happening within the context of the Passover.

[2 : 31] Now, you might say, what is the Passover? Let me remind you. So the Passover feast, which Jesus and the disciples were about to partake of, celebrates the Passover event, right, the Exodus, which happened 1300 BC.

So 1300 years BC, the Jews were slaves in Egypt, and God repeatedly spoke to Pharaoh through Moses and said, let my people go. And Pharaoh was warned nine times with various curses befalling the Egyptians.

Pharaoh was unmoved until the final curse. which was a big one. It was the death of the firstborn in every household. Firstborn in every household was going to die.

Except Jesus spoke to his people and said, slaughter a lamb and put the blood of the lamb on the door. And when death comes to the city, it will pass over your household.

So death would pass over a house where a death had already occurred. So a young Jewish boy, the firstborn in that family, would wake up the next morning and could say, I lived because a lamb died.

[3 : 44] I lived because a lamb died. After this judgment, Pharaoh relinquished. He let God's people go, but then he changed his mind and chased them.

And God led the Jews through the Red Sea, which closed in on the Egyptian army. So that's it in a nutshell. And I hope you see that the Passover is more than just the Jews got out of slavery.

That's great. It's much more than that. The Passover as an event is about three things. It's about judgment. It's about salvation. And it's about victory. It's about judgment.

It's about salvation. It's about victory. Let's look at judgment for a moment. So the Jews in Egypt, their biggest problem was not Pharaoh.

Their biggest problem wasn't finding safety from Pharaoh. In the Exodus story, it says death is coming to the whole city.

[4 : 41] Their biggest problem was safety from God. Death was coming to the whole city. Judgment was coming to the whole city, which means without the lamb, the fate of the Jews would have been no different than that of the Egyptians.

They would have also lost their firstborn. So Passover is about judgment. And it's about salvation. So God judges and simultaneously protects his people from his own judgment by the blood of the lamb.

God makes a way. It's about judgment. It's about salvation. It's about victory. Victory because this is the beginning of God's people's journey to the promised land.

All right. So that's the historic event. And after Passover, if you keep reading Exodus, God gives them a meal, a rite, a liturgy to remember what happens.

You know, in the Old Testament, one of the great sins of the Old Testament is forgetting. And God says, I don't want you to forget what happened. So here's a special feast. Keep doing it.

[5 : 46] So that is what the Passover meal is about. Now, again, why does Matthew keep bringing up the Passover at the beginning of this little section?

Because, I'll say it again, everything about to happen is happening within the context of the Passover. And during that Passover meal, Jesus is going to say something offensive and radical. He's going to say the salvation God's people experienced in Egypt all those years ago and the meal that we eat, that we're going to eat today. It's all about me.

It's all about me. The thing at the center of the Jewish faith, the Exodus, Jesus is going to say, it's all about me. The lamb that you eat during that meal, that's me.

It's all pointing to my death and what it accomplishes. Right. There is a lot more to say about that. And Jesus gets to that in the third section of our reading.

[6 : 49] But before we get there, we have this middle section, this very interesting middle section. So let's talk about that for a couple of minutes. Verses 20 to 25. So the disciples and Jesus have found the guy.

They found the room. They've got the meal. They're eating the meal. They're in the middle of the Passover meal. And Christ drops a bombshell on them in verse 21. He says, Jesus doubles down and he says, and I really like this line.

He says, And this is terrible. I have this idea of as Jesus is speaking, somebody's just reaching across to grab some, just reaching across to grab some hummus or something.

That would have been awkward. So Jesus drops this bombshell. Now, the dipping the hand in the food business, that's just Christ saying, he's just saying, look, it's one of us.

One of the people around this table sharing this meal right now, it's one of you who's going to betray me. And it's interesting that after Jesus says that, none of the disciples are like, Judas, come on, man.

[8 : 08] Like, obviously, no one had any idea. He had covered his tracks very, very well. Now, have a look at verse 24. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him.

But woe to the man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. For it would have been better for that man if he had never been born. Right.

So Jesus says two really huge things here, doesn't he? He says, one, he says, betrayal on the cross, that's the plan.

Nothing is going to stop that. And then on the other hand, he says, and woe to the betrayer. So do you see what Jesus is saying here? He's saying God is in complete control.

He is absolutely sovereign. He's in total charge. Nothing is happening without him saying yes. And he's also saying you are completely responsible for your actions.

[9 : 11] Judas was not a puppet of God. So what do we do with this? How do we resolve these two things?

How do we sort of mush them together in our mind in such a way that makes sense? Well, sovereignty and free will. The Bible does not tell us how they work together.

It proclaims both of these truths. And it's throughout the Bible. Actually, in Acts 2, the very first sermon preached after the resurrection, listen to what Peter says in Acts 2.

He says, this is verse 23, Acts 2. This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

So again, the very first sermon, it raises this issue again. God is completely in charge and what you do matters. And we might have intellectual problems with this idea.

[10:16] But can I just say, believing what the Bible says about this, holding up both these two truths, is just an incredibly practical thing for us to think. And I'll tell you why it's so practical for us.

Two things. One, if you really believed that your actions could change the plan of God, if you really believed that, a couple of things would happen.

Either, well, one, you have a very high view of yourself. Two, you'd be constantly fretting. On the other hand, if you really believe what you do doesn't matter, because God's in control, doesn't matter what you do, you have no incentive to live well.

You have no incentive to seek God in your life. Okay, we have to stop, we have to press pause on that, and we have to keep going. Let's look at verse 25 to finish this middle section that we're in.

Verse 25. Do you notice that the other disciples say, is it I, Lord?

[11:28] And Judas says, is it I, Rabbi? Is it I, Teacher? So something, either something has happened in Judas' estimation of Jesus, or perhaps he couldn't bring himself to call him Lord, knowing what he has done.

In John's Gospel, we get an extra detail here, which is helpful. Jesus, who's the host of the meal, he gets to choose who sits in the position of the places of honour on his left and his right.

And Judas, in John's Gospel, says that he's sitting in a place of honour at the table. He's sitting right beside Jesus. And why has Christ done that?

Because he's giving him an opportunity to change. He wants Judas to know, I know it's you. And it doesn't have to be this way.

It's Jesus reaching out to Judas, but Judas refuses. He can feel the weight of those 30 pieces of silver in his pocket.

[12:39] As he's having this conversation, he can feel the weight of that money in his pocket. And it feels good. Surely you don't mean me, teacher. Surely you don't mean me.

It's just such an ugly, cynical thing to say, isn't it? He thinks he can fool Christ, right? He thinks he can fool Christ, which we think sometimes.

Folks, if you're at church today and you are doing churchy stuff at church, but you have concrete plans to betray your God today or this week, and you're here and you're saying the right things, but you can feel the money in your pocket and the plans are set, folks, can I remind you, you cannot bluff God.

You cannot fool Christ. On this first Sunday of Lent, you need to repent. You need to hear the words of God and you need to see yourself in Judas and make a different decision.

We've looked at the first section where Matthew tells us it's all about Passover. We've looked at the second section. We hear about the betrayal of Judas.

[14:01] And now we're going to look at the final section here, the last section, verses 26 to 29. Is everyone still with me? You with me? Great.

Okay. So Jesus and his disciples, they're doing the meal, the Seder. And the Passover meal, if you've been to one before, you'll know there are words and actions relating to the deliverance from Egypt.

And here's what's amazing. So at the point of the meal where Jesus should have pointed them back to what happened in Egypt, at that point in the meal, he points them to himself.

And he says, my death is the central thing. Every deliverance in the Old Testament is pointing to me and my death.

My death on the cross is going to be the exodus of all exoduses. And then Christ, he creates a new meal for us, a new right, and he gives us words. And he asks us to perpetually remember these words in communion.

[15:12] Now, let's get into the details just a little bit here. Jesus, he took bread and he broke it. What does that mean? It's pointing to the violent death that Christ will experience.

And then he takes wine, a common cup of wine, and he says, this is my blood poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. So here Jesus points to the meaning of his death.

It's not he's going to die, but it's not a pointless, violent death. Jesus' death is not the result of his enemies weaving a plot he couldn't escape.

He would die because God willed it. And there was a purpose in this death. The death was for many for forgiveness. Now, do you notice that the main course of the Passover meal is not mentioned?

Do you notice that? So far, it's just sort of, it's just kind of bread and wine. Sometimes my wife will go out to dinner at a girlfriend's house and stay there for a few hours and she'll come home and go, how was it?

[16:18] Oh, we had a great time. And I'll say, what did you eat for dinner? What did you have for dinner? And she goes, you know, like wine, cheese, crackers. And I'm like, yeah, but like what did you have for dinner? She's like, wine, cheese, crackers.

That's not a dinner. Where's the protein? Where's the main bit of the meal? Why does not Jesus mention the lamb? He doesn't mention it.

He never mentions it because he's the lamb. He's the lamb. So remember I said the Passover event was about three things. It's about judgment, it's about salvation, and it's about victory.

This is what the cross is about. Judgment comes to the city but passes over the house where the lamb was slain. Death passes in houses where a death has already occurred.

The little firstborn little boy gets up in the morning after Passover and says, I'm saved because the lamb has died. Well, judgment comes to this world. But Christians say, I am saved because Jesus died.

[17:23] He died in my place. And this is the basis for the new covenant. So Christ, he interrupts the Passover meal. He changes the liturgy and he says, it's all about me.

There will be judgment, but it will fall on me. There will be salvation for you and there will be victory. And that's verse 29 there.

Jesus says, Jesus picks up on this whole meal idea again and points us to a time when he will return, when he will defeat evil and we will banquet with him.

It's this picture of eternal joy and abundance and rich relational goodness. And that's what communion is about. But do you notice here that Jesus specifically talks about eating and drinking? It's a way of saying we get to appropriate what Jesus is going to do, what Jesus has done. So he doesn't just break the bread and go, my body is broken and then put it over here and go, yeah, look at that.

[18:34] It's going to get broken. He doesn't pour a glass of wine and go, yeah, wine, it kind of looks like blood and I'm going to bleed. And I'm just going to sit there for you to look at. No, he says, eat and drink.

Why? Because he wants us to take on the benefits of the cross into our life. That's the picture. So communion is more than just, it's more than just remembering like we remember a great holiday we went on.

It's remembering what has happened for us and living into that. Now I'll finish here with a great scene from the Lord of the Rings book.

So chapter five in the final one, the return of the king. So there's this big battle and it looks really bad.

And Pippin, the hobbit, is standing at the gate of this fortress and this huge demon king breaks through the gate. And Pippin realises he's going to die.

[19:37] And he's staring death in the face. And suddenly, what does he hear? He hears the horns. The horns. It's the riders of Rohan.

It's the cavalry. He is saved. And let me read what Tolkien writes at this moment. But Pippin rose to his feet as if a great weight had been lifted from him.

And he stood listening to the horns. And it seemed to him that they would break his heart with joy.

And never in years could he hear a horn blown in the distance without tears starting in his eyes.

The bread and the wine. That's our horn. That's the living memory. That's what the cross means.

That we are free. That we are forgiven. And we'll be with Christ for eternity. Amen. Amen. Thank you.