

“PASSOVER AND THE LAST SUPPER.”

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Scripture Texts: Mark 14:12-26

Introduction.

As I said last week Chapter 14 of Mark marks a dramatic turn in events. This chapter gives the details of the last night of Jesus' earthly life before His death.

Jesus' entire three years of ministry had been a running battle with the powers of darkness, both human and demonic. Now the battle is engaged as never before.

Remember back at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when He was tempted by the tempter. At the end of that scene in the wilderness we read:

Luke 4:13 And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

That opportune time has arrived.

Mark 14:12-16, Passover preparation, “Just as He said.”

Our text is a contrast of shadows and realities, of faint outlines and clear objects.

It was the week long feast of Unleavened Bread which began with Passover. The best guess of Bible scholars is it's Thursday, the 13th of the Jewish month of Nisan, somewhere around 30 to 33 AD. Nisan is the first month of the Jewish calendar and aligns with our March and April.

Passover was the most important feast observed by Jews and according to Deuteronomy 16:5-8 it was observed only in Jerusalem. Every Jew dreamed and hoped at least once in his life to observe the Passover in Jerusalem. To this day every Passover celebration ends with the declaration, “Next year in Jerusalem.”

Our texts begins much the same way the triumphal entry story began. Jesus sent two disciples (Luke tells us they were Peter and John) and gives them precise details of what to do. This is another one of those reminders that Jesus is God, He knows all things and sees all things. More importantly Jesus is in complete control and everything is “just as he told them.”

This may have been lost on the disciples in the moment, but the memories of these details would later be a great comfort to them as they should be to us now.

When things seem to be spiraling out of control the most, always remember this revelation of the divinity of Jesus and His complete control and power over all darkness and evil. Everything is just as He said.

Note what the disciples did. They immediately obeyed what Jesus said. They very easily could have questioned any number of things. “How on earth do you expect us to find one particular man with a jar of water in this city teeming with hundreds of thousands of Passover pilgrims? And how many of them must be carrying jars of water? And what if the master of the house says no, after all there are lots of people in this city who hate you?”

Brothers and sisters, there are many times in our lives when Jesus calls us to submit to something difficult, or follow commands that may not make sense or seem unreasonable. These are tests of faith, and they are meant to improve our faith and increase our faith.

If we desire to grow in faith, then we must submit and obey and trust the Lord and not be anxious but wait for Him to answer or help or lead or bring the success or reward.

Galatians 6:9 Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Mark 14:17-21, Betrayal, “Lord, is it I?”

After sundown Jesus led the Twelve to the upper room that was prepared for the Passover feast. Jesus set a somber tone for the meal by announcing that one of the twelve would betray Him.

The rest of the meal and the rest of the night was under a cloud. John ends his account with that most enigmatic phrase, “And it was night.” Darkness was about to fall on the whole earth. They say it’s always darkest before dawn.

Judas is one of the darkest figures in human history. How could he see and hear what he did for three years and still betray the Son of God? How could he sit at this table in this intimate fellowship on this night and share the same bread and bowl, thinking about what he had committed himself to do?

But wait a minute. Jesus doesn’t reveal who it was. He leaves each of the disciples asking, “Is it I?” Jesus teaches us here that self-examination is crucial to the Lord’s Supper. He stirred up all the disciples to ask the question, “Is it I?” When we come to the Lord’s Table, we should make careful and diligent inquiry into our souls.

Have I betrayed the Lord with my sin, with my lack of faith, my disbelief, my envy or covetousness, my fear or anxiety, my self-centeredness?

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Don't be your own judge and don't be another's judge. But ask, "Lord, is it I? Could it be me? Am I the guilty one? Show me my heart, test me and try me that there be no evil way in me." Let Jesus be the judge of your soul. Let Jesus be the one who declares you forgiven.

Jesus sums it up the betrayal of Judas with a powerful two-edged sword of a verse:

Mark 14:21 For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

This is one of those humbling passages of Scripture, humbling in the sense that it exposes the weakness of our own human reason. This is a passage that says that God's thoughts and God's ways are higher than my thoughts and ways, beyond my feeble comprehension. The problem is not God, it's me.

This text teaches us to hold in tension two important truths consistent taught in Scripture.

First, God is sovereign and in control of all things. Nothing happens without His knowledge, will or permission. Everything is just as He said.

Second, sinners are always addressed as responsible human beings, as free moral agents who must bear the consequences of their behavior and the fruit of their labors and actions. Lord, is it I? Am I guilty by my own sinful actions?

It was ordained by God and written into human history from before the foundations of the earth that Jesus would be betrayed, and yet at the same time it was the free choice of one man who bears full responsibility for his actions. It's not a contradiction; it's a mystery and a reality.

God has His purposes which He works without violating or removing human responsibility. We can never use predestination as an excuse for our actions. We can never say, "The devil made me do it." Nor can we ever try the excuse, "God made me do it."

Judas had a plan and his plan was part of a much bigger plan, part of the Jewish leaders plan, part of Satan's plan and part of God's plan. There are two strong undercurrents beneath the historical events and facts. There is a plan of destruction and there is a plan of salvation. There is a plan that is meant for evil and there is a plan that is meant for good.

Behind the plan for destruction there is a plan for salvation. As the disciples were preparing for the Passover meal, Jesus was planning for a new meal, a new covenant, with a new Lamb.

Mark 14:22-26, The Last Supper, "This is my body."

By sovereign design and intention Jesus' institution of the Last Supper is rich in Passover traditions. This is one of those times when it helps to understand the Jewish roots to our own faith and practice.

Fifteen hundred years before Jesus, the people of Israel had spent 400 years in slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh. God announced through Moses that He was going to deliver His people and lead them to the Promised Land. Through nine terrible plagues Pharaoh resisted letting the people go.

God announced the final plague, an angel of death would come and kill the first-born in the land. He said it would fall on every home, Jews and Egyptians alike. The only escape was God's one provision for protection, the blood of a sacrificed lamb. At the end of that night in every home there would be either a dead child or a dead lamb. The child was spared only if they took shelter under the substitute.

So on this very week in Jerusalem the minds of all the Jews in Israel were thinking about their past bondage in slavery and their brush with death, about the destroying angel that passed over their homes, about the safety under the blood, the first born being spared, the importance of eating the lamb.

The Jews, then as now, thought that the God ordained the Passover so they would look back and remember God's goodness in that ancient act of deliverance from Egypt. But God also gave the Jews the Passover so that they would anticipate and hope for and look forward to God's better deliverance through a Messiah.

Jesus fulfills the Passover. He is the new Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. What was a shadow is now a reality.

The Passover meal was divided into four parts and each part included explanations of the meaning of the feast and each part ended with drinking a cup of wine. After the second cup the bread was eaten, followed by the lamb and then the third cup.

How surprised must the disciple have been when Jesus explains the elements in terms of Himself rather than in terms of the ancient exodus?

In the simplest of words Jesus took bread, which was called the bread of affliction and blessed it, then He broke it and gave it to His disciples saying, "This is my body." Luke adds, "which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Jesus said from now on this is a sign of His body wounded and broken for us.

Then Jesus took the *third cup*, the cup of blessing and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." This third cup is the only cup of our sacrament, a cup of blessing and thanksgiving.

The *fourth cup* is the cup of consummation. Jesus did not drink that cup, but left the Passover meal incomplete. He said He would not drink that cup until the day of consummation in heaven when we all sit together at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Jesus was announcing that what this meal signified tonight and what would be accomplished on the cross tomorrow will be fully and finally fulfilled in the kingdom to come when men and women from every tribe and tongue and people and nation are ransomed by the blood of Jesus and gathered for the marriage feast of the lamb.

In the midst of the gloom and the soberness of betrayal and death, there is this great hope. Yes there is a cross but beyond the cross is the resurrection. This is a sure promise that something much better is ahead. And you will see that everything is just as He said.

Revelation 19:9 Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

What a day that will be. It was as if Jesus was saying, “This year in Jerusalem, next year in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Mark 14:26, sang a hymn and went out.

Mark and Matthew end the Last Supper with an interesting detail. This is the only reference in Scripture to Jesus singing.

The Passover meal usually concluded near midnight with the singing of Psalms 116-118 and/or 136 and then drinking the fourth and final cup of wine which they didn't do.

Jesus deliberately went to that place where He knew He would meet His betrayer. And it was night. This was Satan's hour, or should I say, his fifteen minutes of fame and glory. But it was just as Jesus said. His body had to be broken in order for Him to deliver us from our betrayal.

Application and conclusion.

The Passover reminded the Jews that none of them were safe unless they killed an innocent unblemished lamb.

The Passover reminded the Jews that none of them were safe unless the door-posts of their homes were sprinkled with blood.

The Passover reminded the Jews that none of them were safe who did not eat actually eat the lamb.

Every OT sacrifice was meant to point to a new and better sacrifice. And the sacrifice of the Passover lamb was the most significant of all and the most like Christ. This shadow most closely resembled the reality.

Jesus is the Lamb of God, the unblemished, innocent Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world. The wrath of God is coming to bring the wages of sin upon all mankind, and the wages of sin is death. No one is safe except those who look to Jesus to deliver them from the bondage of sin. No one can have life except those who trust in Jesus to deliver them from death to eternal life. Only the blood of Jesus sprinkled on our consciences can cleanse us from all sin and unrighteousness and keeps us safe from the wrath that is coming. Only those who feed on Christ by faith will benefit from His provision and protection.

Passover was to remember. The Lord's Table is to remember. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the bread we remember Christ's body wounded and broken for our transgressions. In the cup we remember Christ's blood shed for the cleansing and forgiving of all our sins.

By this sacrifice Christ bore God's wrath and satisfied God's justice and reconciled us to the Father.

All of this should be cause for humility when consider the price Christ paid for what we did.

All of this should be cause for worship that so great a debt has been paid and so much grace has been poured out.

I was once a slave with a death sentence hanging over me, but by God's grace and provision I took refuge in a substitute, the blood of the Lamb and He covered my sin and delivered me from the just wrath of God and now has secured a place for me in His Promised Land. I look forward to and long for that day when I will sit down at His table and drink that fourth cup of wine with Him in heaven.

Next year in the New Jerusalem! Come Lord Jesus.

Prayer for the Lord's Supper from The Valley of Vision, p. 197:

God of all good, we bless you for this means of grace; teach us to see in this meal your loving purposes and the joy and strength for our souls.

You have prepared a feast; and though we are unworthy to sit down as guest, we wholly rest on the merits of Jesus, and hide our self beneath his righteousness;

When we hear his tender invitation and see his wondrous grace, we cannot hesitate, but must come to you in love. ...

As the outward elements nourish our body, so may your indwelling Spirit invigorate our soul, until that day when we hunger and thirst no more, and sit with Jesus at his heavenly feast.