

Text: Matthew 26:17-25

Title: The Last Passover

Truth: A friend lifted his heel against the Lord.

Date/Location: October 19 and 23, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

As I read this passage, I was struck by the *lack* of emphasis on the ritual of the Passover meal. Some Christians today put a lot of focus on the way the Passover was or is celebrated by the Jewish people, but Matthew leaves such details out of his narrative and instead chooses to focus on what was happening with and to Jesus, and the changes that Jesus was making.

I titled this message “The Last Passover” not because the Passover remembrance ceased after this historical event or was supposed to cease, nor because I want to offend anyone who participates in that remembrance. Rather, I use the title to indicate that ever after this, God desired for it to be remembered differently than it was before. The deliverance from sin and death for His people is far greater than the deliverance from Egypt and rescue from the death angel who killed the firstborn throughout Egypt. As important as the deliverance of the historical Exodus was, there is something *far more significant* that we need to consider.

Who could now celebrate the Exodus Passover *without* an eye toward the greater Lamb of the greater Passover marking deliverance from the greater enemy? How could we miss the adaptation of the meal where the bread and the cup are re-signified to point us to the Messiah? The Jewish Christian is privileged to remember both the original Passover and the new one, but I doubt he could validly remember the original one *without* thinking of what Jesus did.

I. Passover Preparations, v. 17-19

A. The general schedule of the Passover was this: on the first day late in the afternoon or early in the evening (Nisan 14, sometime in March/April) the Israelites would kill their lambs. That evening they would eat the lamb and the rest of the meal as they remembered the flight from Egypt. The evening was technically the

start of the 15th day of the month. Following that evening, the Feast of Unleavened Bread unfolded for the next 7 days (Nisan 15-21). God did not permit them to have leaven in their homes or food for the entire week-long celebration.

- B. Read Exodus 12:1-28. Verse 11 and also 12:34 show why there was no time for leaven to do its work on the loaves of bread they were baking. They had to eat and then leave in haste. I sense a little lesson here...they had to be ready to leave at a moment's notice and could not be tied down waiting hours for bread to rise before baking and consuming it. We too cannot be tied down to this world, thinking we are unable to move out for God—or move on to Heaven.

Leaven also became in the Bible a well-known symbol of sin, though we must caution ourselves not to automatically think “sin” every time we read “leaven” in the Bible. Only if the context indicates that metaphorical connection ought we to make it ourselves.

- C. I believe that some of the components of the initial Passover meal were one-time events. They were not meant to be repeated. I have in mind the putting of blood on the doorposts. The death-angel is not making annual visits to kill the firstborn, so it is not necessary to put a shield of blood on the door. Christians live under the “shield” of the blood of Christ all the time because we have been washed in the blood, our sins are cared for, and we are in Christ. Furthermore, neither Christians nor Jews should think today of the death of the lamb to be eaten as an atoning death, for the last Sacrifice was made, the only one sufficient for sins. Yet the death of the animal is a reminder that the wages of sin is death and that God demands—and provides for Himself—a substitute to stand in the place of people with genuine faith in Christ.
- D. The disciples asked a simple question—where to have the Passover meal? The Lord directed them to a man whom He knew either by previously meeting or in His omniscience. I would recommend we lean toward the former option unless clear evidence exists of the latter option. It is quite possible the Lord pre-arranged with the owner of the house to have a private Passover meal and so be able

to accomplish what was needful that evening before His crucifixion.

The disciples did not know whom they were to meet to locate this building, so the Lord described this certain man in Mark 14:13 and Luke 22:10. He would be carrying a pitcher of water. This may have been unusual in that women would typically do that work and not men. This fellow was a servant: we know that because the Lord told the disciples to speak to the head of the house where the servant went, and find out where he had accommodations for their meal.

Perhaps it was the case that the Lord had previously met the owner of the house, *and* knew in His omniscience that the servant would at that time be carrying a pitcher of water. We need not fuss over such details.

- E. More important are the Lord's statements that His time is at hand and that He will keep the Passover. He was obedient to the Law of God to the very end of his earthly life, his last hours. He knew that the time had come for Him to go to the Father, to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sinners, to die in our place, and to suffer at the merciless hands of the Pharisees and Romans.

Contrast this with John 2:4, 7:6-8, 7:30, 8:20, and with the near arrival of his hour at John 16:32.

II. Passover Betrayal, v. 20-25

- A. This section focuses not on the Passover meal *per se*, but on the story of Judas's betrayal. With the disciples gathered together, they could all hear the Lord's announcement: "One of you will betray Me."
- B. This was a shocker to the disciples because the one who was doing it was very clandestine. They began to be very sad. They quickly became sorrowful. This was not expected at the Passover meal. It's like terrible news being revealed on Christmas morning around the Christmas tree right before exchanging gifts. They knew that the Lord Jesus was not bluffing or lying. This prediction would certainly come to pass.

C. Each was worried about himself that he might be the one to do the betrayal, so they asked the Lord each in turn. He answered by identifying the person very generically: a person who shares in meals with him would be the betrayer. The Lord was steeped in the knowledge and thinking of the Hebrew Bible, and he used Psalm 41:9 to express this terrible situation. Terrible indeed—when someone you thought to be a friend turns and betrays you. The emotional weight of this is tremendous.

D. Two things were going on here in the big picture. **First**, the Son of Man was going as written. The divine plan had to be implemented. The Messiah had to suffer and die according to several passages of the Hebrew scriptures—Isaiah 53, Psalm 16, Zechariah 9:9, 12:10, Gen. 3:15, Daniel 9:26.

E. **Second**, the person guilty of the Lord’s murder is going to suffer judgment. The judgment will be so bad that it would have been better if (counterfactually) the person who did the betrayal had never existed.

This seems to be the case for everyone who rejects Christ. Better for them personally if they had not existed. But they did or do exist, and God decided that for His own good reasons they would exist—not just for themselves personally but for the benefit of others or God or some combination. Nonetheless, they earn for themselves a place of retribution for rejecting God and it is bad for them as individuals. (This line of thought reminds us that we are not here just for ourselves. God has wider purposes for us.)

F. Judas takes his turn to ask the question, “Rabbi, is it I?” He knows very well it is himself, so this is a very disingenuous question.

G. The Lord’s answer: “You have said it.” This is not exactly a direct answer to the inquiry, but it is enough to get the point across. The other gospels bring more detail.

1. It is one of the 12 (Mark 14:20), a restatement of what the Lord said in Matthew 26:21.

2. The hand of the betrayer is with Me on the table (Luke 22:21).

3. Jesus indicated to John that it was Judas (John 13:25-28). Peter was in the know as well. Obviously it did not take long for all the other disciples to understand the same point.

Conclusion

Each and every one of us who are believers in Christ should ask ourselves if we could be the one who would betray or deny or sin against the Lord. If you are not concerned about yourself that you could fall into sin, then you need to re-tool your mindset.

We all have a tendency or seed of sin in us—even after being saved—that can grow into a very bad fruiting tree. We need God’s help to walk the straight and narrow path and not veer off temporarily into bad neighborhoods.

Jesus went through all of this for His creation...for you.

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