

## The Picture of the Passover

Matthew 26:17-30

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17 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" 18 He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" 19 And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

20 When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. 21 And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." 22 And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" 23 He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. 24 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." 25 Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."

26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." 30 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

If I were to ask you what your favorite national holiday is, which one would you pick? The fourth of July? Memorial Day? President's Day? Super Bowl Sunday? Snow Days? What about your favorite church holiday? Thanksgiving? Christmas? Easter?

If I were to ask the same question during the time of Jesus, the answer would have likely been Passover. It was the first of three great feasts where the people of God were required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Deuteronomy 16:16 tells us that those celebrations were Passover (at the beginning of the year), Pentecost (fifty days after Passover), and the Feast of Tabernacles (around the time of harvest). While each was significant, Passover was far and away the greatest and most meaningful. And we will learn why today.

Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples in Matthew 26:17-30, and it marks both an end and a beginning. It marks the fulfillment or the end of the Passover as Jesus, according to 1 Corinthians 5:7 becomes the Passover Lamb, and it marks the beginning of what we commonly call The Lord's Supper or Communion. Our text today is a very important passage because it bridges the history of God's redemption of Israel with the ultimate deliverance through Jesus Christ.

For the next number of weeks we are taking an in-depth look at the Passion of Jesus Christ as recorded for us in Matthew 26-28. And my aim today is to show you the beautiful picture that emerges from the Passover, and how it connects us to the Lord's Supper. What you will find here is **a dynamic, spiritual symbol that captures the beauty and the trauma of redemption.**

## **A Spiritual Memorial**

In order to understand that significance of the Lord's Supper, you need to more fully understand its roots in the Passover. Verse 17 says that on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples asked Jesus where they are going to celebrate the Passover. They are, of course, in the city of Jerusalem along with about 200,000 pilgrims. Jesus is only a few days away from his crucifixion, and our text records what happens on the Thursday before his crucifixion.

Passover was the oldest of all the Jewish festivals with roots that run 3,000 years deep, and when it was practiced in Jesus's day, the people combined the feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover meal into a single event. The Passover meal was the beginning of the festival of Unleavened Bread, but by Jesus's time many people referred to the entire event as Passover (see Mark 14:1 and Luke 22:1).<sup>1</sup>

The meal and festival celebrate the single and most defining moment of Israel's history: the deliverance from Egypt. This redemption out of slavery would become the essence of the identity of Jewish people, the basis of God's claim upon his people, and even the foundation of Law. The preamble of the Ten Commandments sounds like this: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:2-3). Therefore, the Exodus became a constant reference point for the nation in how they relate to God (Deut. 7:8) and how they relate to each other (Deut 15:15). The Jewish nation is an "exodus-people."

If you were to take the great Exodus event and crystalize it into one moment in time, it would be the Passover as recorded in Exodus 12. This meal was inaugurated on the evening before the tenth and final plague – the killing of every firstborn (Ex. 11:4-7). Let's read about this meal in Exodus 12:2-27. It is a long passage but it is worth the reading.

"This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. 3 Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. 4 And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the

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<sup>1</sup>M.R. Wilson, "Passover" - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing), 1979

goats, 6 and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

7 "Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8 They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. 10 And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11 In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. 13 The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

14 "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. 15 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. 16 On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. 17 And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. 18 In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. 19 For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. 20 You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread."

21 Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. 22 Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. 23 For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. 24 You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. 25 And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. 26 And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' 27 you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'"

Imagine with me what it must have been like that night: to be awake, to know that a death angel was moving throughout the land of Egypt, and to hear the national grief as parents discovered that someone from every family had died. Imagine what it must have meant to see grieving neighbors and at the same time seeing the blood on your doorposts, knowing that unimaginable judgment had "passed over" your family. Think of it! Every person was touched one way or another. Some were delivered; most saw death face to face. The Passover celebrated the bloody redemption of God's people out of slavery.

During Jesus's day, the Passover still had great meaning and significance as pilgrims from all over the Near East and Israel traveled to Jerusalem for the celebration. The city would have been teeming with activity as merchants sold their goods to travelers, beggars positioned

themselves in prime locations, and families looked for the lamb that would become their sacrifice. At 3:00 PM, the offering of the Passover sacrifice began, and it took place in three massive shifts. Each person, once inside the temple courtyard, would slaughter his own lamb, drain the blood into a basin, and then throw the blood against the base of the altar while the priests sang the Hallel from Psalm 113-118. After skinning the lamb, placing the fat and kidneys on the altar, the pilgrim would gather with his family for the Passover meal.<sup>2</sup>

This was the preparation that Matthew mentions in passing in verses 18-19. The disciples gathered in a house of an unnamed man to celebrate this important holiday.<sup>3</sup> Their purpose was the same as everyone's purpose when eating the Passover – to remember the day when they came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery by the strong hand of the Lord (Ex. 13:3)

There are deep historical roots in Lord's Table connected to the Passover, but there was also a very interesting and instructive conversation that happened during the meal. It is part of the picture of the Passover.

### **A Personal Examination**

Jesus and the disciples would have eaten the meal around a U-shaped table with reclining couches that sat three people who propped themselves up on their left elbow. That is why verse 20 says "he reclined at table with the twelve."

In the middle of the meal, Jesus shares something with them that changed the dynamics of the event. In verse 21 he says, "Truly, I say to you that one of you will betray me." Jesus had previously stated in Matthew 20:18 and 26:2 that he would be delivered up to the religious rulers, but this is a new and difficult thought. There would be betrayal in their midst. One of *them* would betray him.

The effect of Jesus's statement is that they are all very sorrowful at the thought, and they began to inquire as to whom it was that was going to do this. Verse 22 indicates that they began to say one after the other (probably in rapid fire succession) "Is it I, Lord?"

Think of what was going on in their hearts at this moment. Jesus, by virtue of his statement, has shocked them into deep questioning about their relationship to him. Jesus has made this memorial meal more than just a reflection on the past; he's made it a moment of personal examination, something that the Apostle Paul picks up in 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 when he gives instructions about how to receive the Lord's Table. He says,

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<sup>2</sup> Wilson, "Passover"

<sup>3</sup> Some suggest that this was John Mark's father, but we cannot be certain.

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”

Remembrance was always a part of the Passover meal, but there is now a new dimension as personal examination becomes a vital part of the grace of the Lord’s Table.

Verses 23-24 are loaded with important meaning. First, Jesus cryptically answers their question by saying that the betrayer will be one “who had dipped his hand in the dish with me.” This refers to custom of dipping food into a sweet sauce or relish called haroseth.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the betrayer is one of them. Secondly, Jesus connects all of this to the sovereign plan of God. He says “The Son of Man goes as it is written of him.” Throughout the Old Testament, the Messiah is pictured as a suffering servant (see Isaiah 52-53), and Matthew frequently quotes the important passages from the past in his interpretation of the life of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Jesus warns them about the spiritual disaster for the betrayer: “...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” (Matt 26:24).

Here we see the tension that exists with divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God is working his plan, Judas is a willing participant, and both are equally true. Judas will be a name forever associated with betrayal, and his betrayal of Christ will incur divine judgment.

This section ends with what looks like a private sidebar between Judas and Jesus in verse 25. Notice Judas’s duplicity: “Is it I, Rabbi?” It may be significant that Matthew doesn’t record that Judas said, “Lord.” But the bigger point here is that when Jesus says, “You have said so” (like saying “You said it”) indicating to Judas that he knows about his intentions.

This is quite a remarkable moment that is defining moment. Just think of it! In the midst of the most important celebration of the Jewish calendar is a meal that pictures with amazing parallels the ultimate deliverance of God’s people. And in the midst of this meal are both the beauty of fulfillment and the horror of betrayal. This meal involved both remembering and examining. And out of this will emerge a new memorial to picture a new redemption which fulfills a new covenant.

## **A Dynamic Symbolism**

Jesus takes the Passover meal and he makes a new memorial out of it. We call it Communion or the Lord’s Supper, and in verses 26-29 we see specifically what happened in that Upper Room to create such an event.

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<sup>44</sup> David Turner, *Matthew – Baker Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing, 2008), 625.

<sup>5</sup> For example: Zech 13:7 in Matt 26:31; Zech 11:12-13 in 27:9-10; Psalm 22:1 in 27:46.

The Passover meal involved many different elements, and Jesus took two elements – the unleavened bread and the cup – and gave them a unique and new symbolism. As a part of the Passover the people would cleanse their entire house of leaven which was a symbol of impurity. The unleavened bread was to be reminder of both the hurried nature of their departure from Egypt, the value of purity, and the affliction of their experience in Egypt. Listen to the term given to the unleavened bread in Deuteronomy 16:3 -

3 You shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, **the bread of affliction**—for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.

Therefore think of all the symbolism of what happens in verse 26. Jesus takes the unleavened bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to his disciples while he says, "Take, eat; this is my body." Luke 22:19 says, "This is my body which is given for you." Symbolically he is saying that his body is the new bread of affliction, and he invites them to partake of his suffering. You can hear the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 in this moment:

4 Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his stripes we are healed.

Jesus is invited them to "partake" of his body which would be afflicted by the wrath of God. This sharing in Christ's affliction in the Lord's Supper symbolizes what takes place spiritually when a person receives the suffering of Jesus under the wrath of God to bear the punishment for our sins. To take his body means that you identify with him, you receive him, you trust in what he has done. You live vicariously – through the life of another. And the effect is that forever you are marked and transformed by what it means for you to be "in Christ."

- ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith (Rom 3:23-25).
- 30 He is the source of your life **in Christ Jesus**, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor 1:30).
- 17 Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17-18).

It is no wonder that Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). This vicarious identification is the basis of everything in the Christian faith.

Jesus, however, didn't stop with the bread. Equally significant is what he did with the cup.

The Passover meal had four cups that were connected the four promises in Exodus 6:6-7 –

6 Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and **I will bring you out** from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and **I will deliver you** from slavery to them, and **I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. 7 **I will take you to be my people**, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians (Ex 6:6-7).

Verse 27 tells us that he took a cup, and gave it to them. And he gave them this instruction:

"Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Matt 26:27-29).

If we understand this correctly, it seems that Jesus took the third cup – the cup of redemption – and he changed it to represent his "blood of the covenant." Luke 22:20 says "this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." Jesus saw his actions as the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31 where God promised a new covenant that would be written on their hearts.

To make that new covenant possible, forgiveness had to happen. Therefore, Jesus links this new cup, his blood, forgiveness: "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). Here is where the Passover meal and Christ's atonement converge so beautifully. In the same manner that blood was sprinkled on the doorposts of the house and God's death angel passed over and in the same way that the Passover Lamb's blood was poured out at the base of the altar remembering that event, so Christ's blood will be shed so that God's wrath against sin can be passed over.

and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith (Rom 3:24-25).

Propitiation means something that appeases, and that is exactly what Jesus did. He appeased the just demands of God's holiness that sin had violated. Sin was paid for and therefore God could forgive sin without being unjust. Jesus's death became the basis of God being both just and justifier (Romans 3:26).

D.A. Carson, our speaker for THINK|11 has written a book called *Scandalous – The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* that we are going to make available to you during our conference on

March 4 and 5. It is a wonderful book, and he explains the beauty of propitiation, a word that means to appease:

In pagan propitiation, a human being offers a propitiatory sacrifice to make a god propitious. In Christian propitiation, God the Father sets forth Jesus as the propitiation to make himself propitious; God is both the subject and the object of propitiation. God is the one who provides the sacrifice precisely as a way of turning aside his own wrath. God the Father is thus the propitiator and the propitiated, and God the Son is the propitiation.<sup>6</sup>

Do you see the beauty here?

But there is one cup that remains in the Passover meal – the cup that is connected to the statement in Exodus 6:7 – “I will take you to be my people and I will be your God.” And Jesus says, “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until the day I when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (26:29). With that statement, some believe that Jesus leaves the Passover meal ceremonially unfinished as they skip to the end by singing a hymn. Some believe that this is the reason why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:26 – “for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

The Lord’s Supper connects us to the Passover and the Exodus; it shows us the beautiful fulfillment of Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb; it announces the coming of the new covenant; and it proclaims this message until he comes.

**The Lord’s Table is a dynamic, spiritual symbol that captures the beauty and the trauma of redemption.** It is a memorial of the past, a time for personal examination, and a dynamic symbol. The Lord’s Table causes us to behold the beauty of God’s redemptive plan. It invites all of us to ask whether or not we have fled for forgiveness of our sins to Christ. It symbolizes, in a dynamic, life-giving way, the beautiful sacrifice of Christ as the Lamb of God. The Lord’s Table calls us to remember that...-

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

This is the picture of the Passover and the Lord’s Table.

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<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson, Scandalous – The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Publishers, 2010), 64-65.