

The Passover Lamb

Matthew 26:1-5

We're moving on today after a couple months in chapters 24 and 25, a lengthy passage of Jesus teaching his disciples about his upcoming death and, beyond that, the end of the age. The Olivet Discourse in chapter 24 is followed by several parables in chapter 25, all intended to prepare his disciples for what would soon be happening. All of this is during the last week of Jesus' human life on earth, for we read and studied his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday prior to his resurrection, a day often called Palm Sunday because of the palm branches being spread on the ground as he was honored as a king coming into the city of Jerusalem that day. However, that honor would not continue, and obviously, the coming events of that week would bring about his crucifixion and death. And the immediate expectation of those events are the focus of chapter 26.

v.1-2

The passover itself would be observed on Thursday, thus we are still focused on the events of Tuesday of that last week before Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. And it was the crucifixion to which Jesus turns his attention now, last minute teaching not simply about the actual events which would soon take place, but also of their significance in God's eternal place of salvation for his people. And the passover celebration was central. So let's look at that in more detail first,

I. THE MEANING OF THE PASSOVER.

Again, it is no coincidence that these events are timed by God around the feast of the passover, and it is no surprise that Jesus emphasizes that for the benefit of his disciples,

v.2 "You know that after two days is the Passover."

Let's go back to the original passover, the event upon which the annual Jewish festival is based, found in Exodus 12. The occasion is that God's people of Israel remain as slaves in the nation of Egypt. The Egyptian Pharaoh will not let them leave. Moses had sought Pharaoh's permission, to leave in order to continue to worship the Lord as they were required to do.

Ex. 5:1 "Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" 2 And Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go."

Instead, he imposed a heavier burden of slavery upon them. But still the Lord had promised.

Ex. 6:1 "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land." 2 And God spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the LORD. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them. 4 I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. 5 And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. 6 Therefore say to the children of Israel: I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7 I will take you as My people, and I will be your God."

Those words define just how significant this deliverance out of Egypt would be for the people of Israel. This deliverance would be the very definition of God's covenant with his people, and the covenant promise of their own land, the land of Canaan. The

deliverance out of Egypt was the demonstration of God's covenant faithfulness. "I have remembered My covenant..I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

Even more descriptively, God said,
Ex. 6:7 "I will take you as My people, and I will be your God."

That is the very essence and definition of the covenant relationship which God established with his people. I will be your God and you will be my people. And it was the exodus out of Egypt that established the reality of that promise.

But still Pharaoh wouldn't let the people go, so God sent a series of ten plagues upon Egypt, and to each one, the first nine, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go. But the tenth plague was definitive, the firstborn of every household in Egypt would die. Except for the household of the Israelites. They would escape that death, by providing the sign of blood over their doorpost. It was the blood of the passover lamb, and when God observed that blood over the door he would pass-over that house rather than inflict death upon the firstborn.

Ex. 12:12 "For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. 13 Now 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 the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."

And that deliverance out of Egypt would be represented every year by the observance of the Passover.

Ex. 12:14 "So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance."

God delivered his people out of the land of slavery, into the promised land of their inheritance. In the shadows and types of the Old Testament, that deliverance was their salvation. It was their redemption. It was the ordinance that represented their salvation. It was the sign of the covenant God established with them: "I will be your God and you will be my people." Thus Jesus' reference to the Passover in Matthew 26 are meant intentionally to emphasize...

A. The significance of deliverance.

The passover, which the Jews would then celebrate every year, was nothing less than a celebration of God's saving work to redeem them and claim them to be his own covenant people.

That was the Old Testament. The passover was symbolic, it was a sacrament of that old covenant, a sign and seal of God's covenant promise, and it was that passover meal which Jesus was about to celebrate with his disciples. So, when Jesus declares that "the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified," he is speaking of the fulfillment of that Old Testament shadow. He is talking about the reality which that Old Testament sacrament could only symbolize. And note, in that context,

B. The significance of the sacrificial lamb.

The passover blood was the blood of a lamb. Back to,

Ex. 12:1 "Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2 "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. 3 Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. 4 And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. 5 Your lamb

shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. 7 And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. 8 Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. 10 You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 11 And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover."

It was the blood of that sacrificial lamb that was sprinkled on the doorposts, it was the blood of that sacrificial lamb that caused God to pass-over the families of the Israelites with that plague of death that came to every other household. Thus the passover and the sprinkling of the blood of the passover lamb became one and the same. Thus we read of Moses' faithfulness in,

Heb. 11:28 "By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them."

All of that is the background for what is about to take place in Jesus' human life and earthly ministry.

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So, the Passover would now be connected with and fulfilled by Jesus, the son of man, being "delivered up to be crucified." Let's tie that together by emphasizing,

II. THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS' DEATH.

Jesus spoke to his disciples often about his death, and they

were quite slow to understand and realize the significance of what he was saying, but that emphasis is again obvious here as the time draws near. Remember previously,

Mat. 16:21 "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. 22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" 23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

And again,

Mat. 20:17 "Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."

Now again, two days before the passover, three days before the crucifixion, "You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

I'll make the connection plainly.

A. Jesus would die as the passover lamb.

When he speaks of being delivered up to be crucified, the reference is to all that the Old Testament says about the passover lamb, 100%. Paul says it so clearly,

1 Cor. 5:7 "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore let us keep the

feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

So the blood of the passover lamb would be Jesus’ blood. The blood of the Old Covenant, shed in so many including the passover lamb, would be Jesus’ blood. The blood that God would observe and acknowledge such that he would pass-over and not inflict the judgment of death, was Jesus’ blood. The blood by which we are delivered from the destroyer is Jesus’ blood. And there is no doubt about what that blood would accomplish, namely the forgiveness of sins.

Heb. 9:18 “Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. 19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.” 21 Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. 22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

But, of course, there is forgiveness because of Jesus’ blood. We’ll get to that in a few weeks when we study,

Mat. 26:26 “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

That connection between the passover and the Lord’s Supper is really significant, for the New Testament sign of the covenant is focused on Jesus’ blood. We don’t need to sacrifice any more

animals, no more passover lambs have to die, for Jesus died once and for all. What those Old Testament sacrifices represented, every bit, is now fulfilled in Christ.

Heb. 10:1 “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins...10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”

That is what Jesus is now teaching his disciples. He would die as the passover lamb. And, as such,

B. Jesus would die as a substitutionary sacrifice.

He would die in place of his people, those who actually broke the covenant. He who knew no sin would die for those who were otherwise dead in their sin. In the familiar words of Isaiah 53, prophesying of Jesus, we read,

Is. 53:4 “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 bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Peter puts it this way,

1 Peter 3:18 “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in

the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.”

Rom. 5:6 “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

That’s the whole point of the passover lamb. It was a sacrifice made on behalf of others, and its death would be credited to others. That’s the meaning of the passover. That’s the meaning of the gospel. That’s the meaning of Jesus’ death. And that is what he was teaching his disciples as the end of his life on earth was approaching. But there was, of course, opposition. So what we see along with Jesus teaching his disciples is,

III. THE WICKEDNESS OF MANKIND.

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What is strikingly obvious is all the accounts of Jesus’ death is the evidence of conspiracy. Here the Jewish leaders are mentioned, the chief priests, the scribes and the elders. The Roman leaders would, of course, join in the conspiracy later as the Jewish leaders had no actual authority to inflict civil punishments. What stands out, in the broadest sense, is that,

A. The unbelieving world is in conspiracy against Jesus.

Matthew’s words are plain. They “plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him.” As we’ll see in weeks to come, there was no justice in any of this. No righteousness in the exercise of law. Just intentional, deliberate deception. Trickery, guile, deceit. The Greek words include all those implications. And with that,

B. The consistent testimony of Jesus’ innocence is emphasized.

They had to resort to plotting and trickery, for the truth was obviously not on their side. And they recognized that their wickedness was evident to the crowds, as we read,

v.5

Nothing unexpected in that, however, for anyone who understood the Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah.

Ps. 2:1 “Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 “Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.” 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 “Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.”

It is worth noting that this conspiracy would ultimately fail, for God’s power is surely greater than any power of man. And so when Peter and John would later be forbidden to preach the gospel because of a similar conspiracy, they carried on faithfully, and we read,

Acts 4:23 “And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.’ 27 “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius

Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”

The Lord’s blessing upon the preaching of the gospel of Jesus will surely continue until the end of the age, despite these very conspiracies among wicked men. And evident in all of that is Jesus’ innocence. His full, perfect and complete innocence. Even his enemies recognized that, in their fear of the crowds.

v.4 “[They] plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him. 5 But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”

He was the lamb without defect, the spotless passover lamb. And so this is what we know, this is what I preach, this is the gospel by which you are redeemed, you who trust and believe in Jesus,

1 Peter 1:18 “...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you 21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”