

FOR
THIS
HE
CAME

*Jesus □ Journey
to the Cross*

Bill Crowder



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ONE

IMPRESSIONS FROM AN UPPER ROOM

It is a little foggy in my mind, but it seems I was about eight or nine years old. It was a Sunday morning, and I was sitting in the balcony of the church with my brother. My parents were both seated in the choir, so they were keeping an eye on me from that remarkably clear vantage point. None of this was terribly unusual. What turned the page on that morning was when the Communion portion of the worship service began. The ushers came with the plates of little cubes cut from a loaf of Wonder bread, and, like everyone else, we each took a piece and waited for the instructions to eat. It was quiet and somber. So far so good.

It was at this point that something happened. Maybe I have simply blocked it from my memory, but, for the life of me, I can't remember what actually caused us to start laughing. Nonetheless, we got tickled and started laughing and just couldn't stop! By the time the juice tray came, we were such a mess that we actually spilled it as it passed by—and that was enough to jar us back to reality. Everyone in the balcony turned to show their displeasure with these two delinquents. The usher burned a pretty good hole in my head with his laser-beam eyes. And my brother and I looked sheepish. We were thoroughly embarrassed, and deserved to be. Then I looked down to the choir loft and saw the expression on my dad's face. In that instant, my emotional framework changed from embarrassment to terror. I honestly believed, as only a little

kid caught in a bad situation can, that my life would soon be coming to an end—if not in the church parking lot, certainly when we got home.

It may have been the only time as a kid that I didn't want church to end. When it did, I ran to the car and got in the far back seat of our Plymouth station wagon and hoped that somehow Dad would be distracted and forget what had happened. He didn't. The good news (as attested by the fact that I am here to tell this story) is that I didn't die that day. What did happen, in addition to some punishment that will remain undescribed, was that my dad gave me a very long, very stern, and very appropriate talking-to about the seriousness of the Communion table. Frankly, I didn't understand a lot of the things my dad was saying any more than I had understood it an hour or so earlier when the pastor said it. I didn't understand the symbolism or the meaning or the purpose. None of it. What I did get very clearly, however, is that the Lord's Supper is not something that you play around with—it is very serious. It deals with serious issues in very serious ways. That part I understood. My dad made sure of it.

I wonder if that is somehow similar to the thinking and feeling of the disciples of Jesus as they gathered in the upper room, expecting a feast of celebration and finding that the Master turned the evening into a very somber event. The events transformed from lighthearted festivity to murky symbols and serious words—symbols and words that they did not begin to fully comprehend. Symbols and words that we continue to struggle with in both their meaning and their implications. I think it is extremely valuable to consider those symbols and words and the events that surrounded them as we consider that night—the night before the Cross. Those symbols and words carry great weight, and we must be very careful about how we approach them. Our journey through the passion

does not begin at the foot of the cross, at the courts of trial, or even in a dark garden where Christ would agonize in prayer. No, the path of the suffering of Christ begins at a party—a memorial feast that would become Christ’s own.

THE ROAD TO THE PASSOVER

As we join the story, Jesus has been involved in public ministry for about three years. His public ministry began when He presented Himself to John the Baptist for baptism and then endured the testing of the wilderness at the hand of the Enemy. The following period of public ministry included the selection and training of disciples, public preaching and teaching, and the powerful display of miracles that impacted the physical, natural, and spiritual worlds. (The Bible is not specific about the time frame of these events, but we can get a rough chronology by the recorded Passovers in Jesus’ ministry—Passover feasts that also pointed to the events of Christ’s suffering.)

Now the time has come to celebrate the Passover, and it marks the third recorded Passover of Christ’s ministry. The days of His public efforts are over. The triumphal entry and the cleansing of the temple have been accomplished. The final moments of Jesus’ earthly ministry are rushing to their climax at breakneck speed. During the Passion Week, Christ has spent His days teaching in the temple in Jerusalem and apparently has spent His evenings resting in the home of His friend Lazarus at nearby Bethany. It has been a rigorous and challenging week as Christ has enthralled the crowds and enraged the religious establishment with His teaching.

This Passover, however, will be distinctly different from the other two. This will be the only time that Jesus Himself offers the sacrifice and leads the worship as the head of a group.

- In the first Passover of the public ministry of Christ, He had not yet assembled all of His disciples. Because a group of at least ten men was required to celebrate, Christ could not lead such a feast (John 2:13, 23).
- Jesus sent His disciples ahead to Jerusalem for their second Passover pilgrimage but did not join them there (John 6:1, 7:1). (Some scholars see another Passover feast in John 5:1, but it is not conclusive.)

This Passover will be different—not only from the other two during Christ’s season of public ministry, but different from any Passover that has ever been shared. It will not only be different because Jesus will lead it but also because of the events it will foreshadow in both symbols and words. Jesus will take the ancient feast and transform it from an historic remembrance to a prophetic event. He will build on the Israelite portrait of the events that produced liberation from slavery in Egypt and will create from it a portrait of the next few hours—hours that will result in rescue from the bondage of sin. The disciples are looking back to the Exodus and are ready to party, but Jesus is looking ahead to Golgotha and is ready to give them one of the most significant lessons of their time together.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR A CELEBRATION

In West Michigan, which we have now called home for twenty-seven years, there is a tradition attached to high school graduation: the graduation open house. Frankly, it is a lot of work, but it’s what you do. Weeks ahead of the graduation ceremony, a date is selected and invitations are prepared. A menu is planned and food is purchased. Decorations are bought and a photomontage of the hon-

ored graduate is assembled. In the twenty-seven years that my wife and I have been attending numerous open houses, we have observed that the menu varies (though it usually includes at least one cake, a veggie tray, meatballs in a crock pot, and maybe some of those really good little cocktail weenies in barbecue sauce) and the location can vary (sometimes in the home, sometimes in the church fellowship hall). What doesn't vary is the amount of work parents do to put one of these shindigs on. I know—we have hosted five. The moral of the story? Putting on a party is no party!

This was especially true with the celebration feast of Passover. In addition to issues of location and food preparation, there was an extremely stringent element—the religious guidelines of Judaism rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures, which contained strict rules for the preparation and celebration of the rescue meal. It was a pile of work, especially when, as was the case in the Passover celebrated by Jesus and His men, it was being observed in a city far from home. The logistics were challenging, to say the least, because of the significance of the celebration.

Understanding the Feast

The Passover began in the book of Exodus when God Himself powerfully delivered the children of Israel after about four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. The Hebrews had come to Egypt as welcome guests of Pharaoh during a time of famine. Joseph, a Hebrew slave who had become “prime minister” of Egypt, had brought his family to a place of provision so that he could care for them, and they stayed. After a period of time, there arose a pharaoh who “knew not Joseph,” and, seeing the burgeoning numbers of Israelites as an internal security threat, he placed them in bondage, forcing them to build the cities of Egypt out of bricks and mortar. After centuries of suffering, God rescued them by the

hand of Moses through a series of supernatural events that convinced the pharaoh to let God's people go.

The final event of these divine acts of deliverance was the threatened death of the firstborn of all the land. Hebrew and Egyptian alike were vulnerable to the threat, and Hebrew and Egyptian alike had the opportunity to make use of the prescribed prevention of that death. A lamb was to be slaughtered and its blood placed on the doorposts (side supports) and lintel (door header) of the house. When God's emissary of death saw the blood, he would "pass over" (Exodus 12:1–14). From that night of death and deliverance on, the children of Israel would celebrate Passover with the same elements of the feast that had been used in Egypt.

Passover was one of the high feasts of Israel and contained a number of elements, highlighted by the actual Seder (Passover) dinner itself. The entire event was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, an eight-day period beginning on the fourteenth of Nisan (which corresponds with our March/April). For these eight days, the Jewish people were to eat unleavened bread as a symbol of personal purging and cleansing of sin. This picture was significant, because throughout much of the Bible, leaven (yeast) is symbolic of sin. As the Jews ate this flat, often tasteless, bread, it was a reminder of the explosive and combustible potential of sin when it enters the human heart.

As this most significant Passover comes upon Jesus and His men, it is introduced in Matthew 26:17: "Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?'"

With the coming of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it is time for the preparations of Passover to begin.

Securing a Location

And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples"'" (Matthew 26:18).

The first issue to be resolved was the site for their feast. As men of Galilee, they would not have had homes in Jerusalem. As men of modest means, they would not have had extraordinary resources at their disposal. When the disciples asked Jesus where they should prepare the feast, He offered a unique solution to the problem. He instructed them to go to "a certain man." Jerusalem was teeming with people, and all were there for the feast! What would set apart this "certain man" from all the rest? Matthew didn't answer the question, but Luke did. In his record of the events, the apostolic physician said:

And Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it." They said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare it?" And He said to them, "When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. And you shall say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" And he will show you a large, furnished upper room; prepare it there." And they left and found everything just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover (Luke 22:8–13).

To the Western eye, this would not appear to narrow things down very much. For the Jew in the first century, however, it was

all the information needed. The key element of Jesus' instructions came when He said, "A man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water," for this would have been quite unusual. Fetching water was considered to be a woman's task, so men would have very seldom been seen carrying a water pot. Giving Jesus' instructions in more detail than Matthew, Luke records that they were to follow this man to an "upper room" and to prepare the feast there. Needless to say, it all occurred just as the Master had told them. It is also of note that Peter and John, the disciples closest to Jesus, were the ones selected for the honor—and the work!—of preparing for the Passover meal. They followed this "certain man" to the upper room Jesus had spoken of and set about the business of preparing the meal.

The fact that it was an *upper* room is worth noting. Most houses in that day were single-story boxes with flat roofs and outside stairways leading to a rooftop deck. The deck was like an extra living space that could give some cooling relief from the heat of the house in the evenings. This house went beyond, having an actual room as the second story. Two things bear consideration:

- This may have been the home of a young John Mark, who would have heard the group leave later that evening and followed them to Gethsemane—witnessing the betrayal and arrest of the Lord and fleeing into the night, leaving his sleep clothes behind and then recounting the story in his gospel record (Mark 14:51–52).
- This was undoubtedly the same upper room (Acts 1:13) that would later serve as a haven for the fearful disciples following Christ's death and burial and the place where they later gathered and received the Holy Spirit in anticipation of the day of Pentecost.

So, having their instructions, Peter and John separate from the rest of the disciples and make their way to find the man with the water jug. It is also likely that, at least at first, Judas accompanies them. Judas carried “the bag” (John 12:6) that held the group’s finances and that would have been needed to purchase the necessary supplies for the meal. Now the wheels are beginning to be set in motion.

Preparing the Elements

The disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover (Matthew 26:19).

It is interesting that Matthew, writing his gospel record to a primarily Jewish audience, felt no need to go into any details about the preparations. He just flatly stated that those preparations were made. For our purposes, it would be useful to understand all that was involved. There would have been several steps for Peter and John in setting the room for the anticipated “party,” including:

1. Going to the temple to purchase a pure sacrificial lamb, no doubt at horribly inflated prices, also involving the need to convert their normal money into temple currency at a ridiculous exchange rate. (Just days before, Jesus had cleansed the temple of the marketplace mentality it had assumed, but now the Father’s house was once again a money-making machine.)
2. Slaughtering the lamb in a mass ceremony under the direction of the priests at 3:00 p.m. (Bible scholars estimate that in that one day some 250,000 lambs would be sacrificed.)

3. Catching the blood of the slaughtered lamb in a bowl and pouring it on an altar while singing, “O LORD, do save, we beseech You; O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD” (Psalm 118:25–26).
4. Roasting the lamb on the altar and bringing it to the upper room for the feast.
5. Preparing the other items of the feast—each very symbolic in its own right—after returning to the upper room. The unleavened bread pictured sinlessness. The bitter herbs were to remind the Jewish people of their bitter slavery in Egypt and God’s rescue. The sauce (*charoseth*) was a paste made of figs, nuts, almonds, vinegar, and herbs, symbolizing the mortar used on the bricks in their Egyptian slavery.

Nothing is left to chance. Nothing is superfluous. Every element of the feast is intended to picture something else, with the centerpiece of the meal—the lamb—ultimately picturing the Lamb of God who would in just a few hours take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). All the elements are prepared, meaning that all the pictures are in place and ready for the Lamb to come and make the feast His own memorial supper.

ALTERING THE MOOD OF A CELEBRATION

The first time I led a teaching trip to Israel was a dream come true for me. We traveled up the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and visited Megiddo and the Galilee. We journeyed south down through the Jordan valley and saw the wonder of Beth-Shean, a huge archaeological dig, before stopping at the oasis of Jericho. We then made our way to the crown jewel of Israel, Jerusalem, the city of peace.

On our first day touring the Old City, one of our stops was at the traditional site of the upper room. The architecture was more Byzantine than first-century Jewish, but it's the thought that counts, so we went in.

There were several groups from around the country that had been combined by the tour agency with our little band to make a busload, so we were a bit of a mixed multitude as we worked our way up the narrow staircase to the "room." Once there, we found it was already full of other tour groups that had been drawn to the Bible lands from all over the world, most softly praying or discussing the events of the Last Supper. At that moment, some folks began to sing "Amazing Grace." It was tender, heartfelt, and sweet, and the other tour groups in the room hushed or joined in. When the verse was over, there were soft amens around the room, and all went back to their own meditations.

Unfortunately, the singers had only begun. They continued, growing louder and louder until none of the other groups could even hear each other speak. As several tour guides came and asked the singers to respect the other groups, they relentlessly went on with their concert until all the verses of the old hymn had been spent. Smugly satisfied that they had won the day, the singers marched out triumphantly, consigning to hell two Jewish guides who had questioned their right to so rudely disrupt the upper room. Talk about altering the mood of a moment! The atmosphere in the upper room went from quiet worship and simple prayerfulness to belligerent, combative, un-Christlike attitudes in a matter of nanoseconds. It was a sad time that hung like a dark cloud over our little group for the rest of the day.

In a similar way, the expectations and emotions of the disciples would be quickly unsettled in their upper room experience as well. They were all set for a party and a celebration, but the moment

they would reach the prepared place, it would become apparent to them that this would not be the normal, run-of-the-mill Passover. The mood was different. Something was not quite right. Something felt—wrong. Out of place. Disturbing and disturbed.

The disciples made their way with the Christ from Bethany into the city, within the walls of Jerusalem and within reach of danger itself for the Master. They navigated through the darkened streets and arrived at the upper room. Everything was set, and the disciples must have been experiencing an emotional high. In their eyes, Jesus' popularity was at an all-time high. The triumphal entry, the acclaim of the people as Christ taught in the temple, and the victories He easily won in debate with the religious leaders would have combined to create a sense of invulnerability—but not for long. Everything was about to change.

A Change in Roles

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded (John 13:3–5).

According to culture, Jesus, as the leader of the group, could have rightly expected someone to wash His feet in preparation for the feast. It was customary to provide this service to guests for several reasons. It was certainly refreshing in a hot and dusty climate. More importantly, though, meals were eaten in a reclining position—which meant that it was possible that your feet might be

at someone else's head. Couple this dining style with the reality that first-century Israel did not have modern sewage facilities (refuse and raw sewage were often dumped into the streets), and it was likely that those feet had been walking through some pretty unappetizing stuff. Foot washing was not only a cultural expectation, it was a practical necessity.

Still, none of the disciples rose to wash the Savior's feet. This was a job usually forced upon the lowest servant in the household—and no one wanted to sign up for that. In fact, in only a matter of a couple of hours, these men would be once again arguing over who was the greatest. After a deliberate period of time, Jesus Himself took the towel and the basin and began to wash their feet. Instantly, the mood in the room changed. The Master had become the Servant. The Lord had taken the role of a slave. This was a party no more—something different was going on.

A Change of Heart

As Jesus approached, Peter, the ever-popular “apostle of the foot-shaped mouth,” pulled his legs under him and refused to let Jesus wash his feet.

So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, “Lord, do You wash my feet?” Jesus answered and said to him, “What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.” Peter said to Him, “Never shall You wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.” Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you” (John 13:6–10).

The imagery of servanthood had overwhelmed Peter, and he would not allow the Lord to serve him. It was not humility as much as pride that drove Peter's resistance. "You'll never wash my feet!" Christ immediately drove home the point of the exercise. It wasn't about having clean feet; it was about having a clean heart—a heart that was continually being cleansed by the ongoing work of the Savior. It was intended to serve as the symbolic equivalent of 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The point? As we confess our sins to Christ, He provides the cleansing that allows our relationship with the Father to be unhindered. But we must be willing to humble ourselves before Him and submit to His cleansing and His Word. Peter's salvation had been cared for, secured when he gave his life to Christ. Foot washing was to picture the ongoing, day-to-day relationship of walking with God through a filth-laden world.

Immediately, Peter's emotional pendulum swung to the other extreme—"Not just my feet then! Wash me all over!" Christ's response was direct and plain: "No. That has already been resolved. It is the ongoing cleansing of the dirt of the world that is needed." Peter submitted—as we must submit—to the cleansing of Christ, and the celebration, albeit a very different celebration from the one the disciples had anticipated when they entered the upper room, could now begin. That celebration, like the mood of the room and its occupants, would also need to be changed.

CHANGING THE MEANING OF A CELEBRATION

The Passover had stood for hundreds of years to point the hearts of the Israelites back to their jubilee of rescue from the other side of

the Nile. It would now focus on a different point of rescue. As Christ led His men through the ritual, all the parts had meaning, and each message was profound. Now Christ would make this His own—not to point the eyes of Israel back to bricks and mortar and chains, but to point the eyes of the world back to the Cross. The King introduced this as the ritualistic steps of the feast unfolded under His direction.

1. Jesus gave thanks for symbols that represented His coming crucifixion and shared the first of four cups prepared for the feast. Each of those cups was linked to a promise in Exodus 6:6–7. The promise of the first cup? “I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians.” Then, Jesus offered the prayer of blessing: “Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”
2. To remind those present of the hardness and bitterness of the years of slavery in Egypt, Jesus introduced the element of the bitter herbs.
3. Next, He presented the unleavened bread and the sacrificed lamb as the focal points of the feast.
4. Jesus and the disciples dipped the bitter herbs in vinegar and ate them.
5. The next step involved the preparation of the wine, which, in a Jewish household, would prompt the youngest son to ask the ritual question, “Why is this night different from other nights?”
6. The group then sang Psalms 113 and 114 before drinking the second cup, linked to the promise, “I will rescue you from their bondage.”

7. As recorded in John 13, Jesus then washed His hands and prepared the “sop” as the disciples ate the herbs. As the Master washed His hands, He then hit them with a thunderbolt of information for which they were completely unprepared. “One of you will betray Me!” (vv. 20–21). The disciples’ world turned on this moment as they began to struggle with the implications of Christ’s words. “One of us? A traitor? How can it be? Who can it be?”

As the realization of betrayal sank in, the Eleven responded with an appropriate lack of self-trust: “Lord, is it I?” Each one somehow understood that he was actually capable of such a thing, and each feared that he might be the one to sell out the Savior. By contrast, Judas, perhaps to test Christ and see if He already knew of his arrangement with the Pharisees, also asked, “Teacher is it I?” (v. 25), but in a shameless hypocrisy that sought to hide behind the mask of concern. If He were testing Christ to see if He knew, the answer would become brutally clear—He did! Jesus reveals this knowledge of His betrayer when John (at Peter’s request) asks, “Lord, who is it?” (vv. 24–25).

Jesus answers John that the betrayer is “the one to whom I give the sop.” In the first of several pictures of grace that Christ would continue to extend to Judas throughout this long, dark night, the Master gives the sop—a portion of bread wrapped around a piece of lamb, bitter herbs, and one radish (all of which spoke of the coming suffering of the Savior)—to Iscariot. What makes this a picture of grace? Traditionally, the head of the group gave the sop to the guest of honor at the feast! Here is grace freely offered to the one who had agreed to sell the Son for the price of a slave.

Judas, in an act of treachery, accepts the sop—giving the appearance of acceptance without the reality of acceptance—then leaves

the group, the upper room, and the presence of the Lord. He departs to complete the act of treachery Jesus had just exposed and “goes out into the night.” One of the greatest pictures of human tragedy in the Scriptures, Judas Iscariot symbolizes wasted opportunity, rejected grace, and unaccepted love. Fatal choices all.

The sop is now passed for all to share in, but the atmosphere has changed! It is no longer a festive celebration, but the foreboding beginnings of a wake. These men are now saddened by the heart-breaking news of the presence of a traitor in their midst. In fact, they are so stunned by these events that, for this moment, their arguing is silenced and their grasping for position and power is stymied by the significance of the sudden turn their night has taken.

I find it extremely significant that the disciples had no clue that the traitor was Judas! We have caricatured Judas as the evil-looking, dark, sinister presence among the apostolic band, but that simply was not the case. He blended in with the rest, looking and acting like the others. He was so much an accepted part of the team that it is even possible that Judas was the last one they would have expected! This probably was because Jesus showed Judas no less grace, no less love, and no less mercy than He did anyone else in the group, though He knew all along that Judas would betray Him.

Calvary is now less than twenty-four hours away, and already the weight of the cross burdens the Lord’s shoulders. Yet, in this moment and over the ashes of a dying feast, Jesus presents us His monument—not in stone or marble, but in bread and wine. The mood in the upper room is somber and reflective—as ours should be any time that we approach His table and reflect on that monument. Why?

- Because *all* Passovers were celebrated in the shadow of the Cross—a place we must learn to live as well.

- Because *all* of us have the capacity to betray the Savior—which should drive us to our knees in dependence upon Him.
- Because *all* of us have at one time or another denied Him in word or thought or deed and must deal with that in confession as we view the table of His cross.

This explains why Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:23–31, issues warnings to the church regarding how we take part in this memorial feast we refer to as the Lord’s Supper, or Communion. He challenges us to examine ourselves for two things: making sure we are in the faith and confessing all that is in us that does not please the Savior.

This is the mood in which He established His feast in Matthew 26, and it should be the tone of our own hearts when we partake of His table. Out of the ancient rite of Passover, Jesus, in simplicity, lifts two elements of the feast from which to create His memorial.

Bread: “While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples” (v. 26). Though this bread pictured the suffering He would endure on our behalf, He gave thanks for it! Yet it pictures for us not only His suffering but His continuing provision for us as well. He is the “Bread of Life” (John 6), and Jesus pictured that marvelous reality with a symbol designed for us to take in, to taste, to experience in the most personal of ways. Imagine the sober quietness and the haunting silence of the upper room as the disciples watched Jesus break the bread, telling them to eat and saying, “This is My body” (v. 26). They must have wondered at those words as they took and ate.

Cup: Again, in spite of what it pictured—His blood offered as the sacrifice to cleanse us from sin—Jesus gave thanks (vv. 27–28)! The wine symbolized something deeper, however. It pictured the blood of the Passover Lamb that would end the slaughter of Passover lambs forever. It was specifically called the Cup of Redemption and was connected to the third of the great promises of Exodus 6:6–7: “I will redeem you.” And that is precisely what the shedding of Christ’s blood would accomplish—redemption. His blood would remove sin, resolve guilt, and exhaust the eternal penalty of sin. As the Eleven partook of it with thankful, awestruck hearts, so should we whenever we participate in His table.

They have already had a long, emotional, and stressful evening, but the night has just begun. The feast is adjourned, and the group leaves the upper room—without drinking the fourth and final cup of the unconcluded, yet now finished, Passover celebration. The fourth cup is linked to the kingdom, which explains Christ’s statement that He would not again drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom had come (v. 29). Every detail has been attended to and every issue resolved. Now, they depart into the night singing (v. 30) the traditional closing psalms of the Passover celebration, Psalms 115–18. By the reckoning of the Jewish calendar, where the new day begins at sundown, it is now already the day of the Cross—yet, as Jesus participates (along with His men) in these psalms of worship and praise, He sings, “This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it!” (Psalm 118:24). It is the day of the Cross—pictured in bread and wine. It is the day of suffering—memorialized in a celebration feast. It is the day that the Lord has made, and He rejoiced in that day—the

day that would bring Him death, and the death that would bring us life.

I must confess that as that young boy in the balcony of our church so many years ago, I did not comprehend the significance of the Lord's Table. In fact, for years to come it just seemed to be (and was often treated as) a mechanical ritual that was generally tacked onto the end of the service. As I grew up and eventually embraced the cross symbolized in the Table, all of that changed. I find it extraordinarily difficult to approach the memorial feast with anything less than the sober reality of what my sin cost my Savior and the wonderful assurance of how deeply and profoundly God loves. A few thoughtful impressions from an upper room are helpful to remind us of both.

Living Christ, there is no altar on which to offer sacrifices and no need for them. The Table displays Your love, and the sacrifice of Your grace is pictured for our hearts to embrace. Thank You for Your sacrifice. Thank You for the Cross. Thank You for the crumbs of broken bread that remind us of Your sufficient supply and for the cup that reminds us forever that You have kept Your promise to redeem us. Remind us of our frailty and our dependence upon You. Help us to respond to Your unspeakable gift with worship, love, gratitude, and obedience—that our hearts may display the grace You have freely given. Amen.