

life group study guide

March 8, 2015

Remembering What Jesus Did Builds Our Hope

“The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter...he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.”

Isaiah 53: 6-7, 12

Read: Mark 14: 12-26

For the Jewish culture, Passover is an annual meal that commemorates a defining moment in Israel's history. When the Jewish people were enslaved to Egypt's pharaoh, their entrapment in miserable bondage caused God to send a series of plagues upon the country. One night God sent the final and ultimate plague, His sword of divine justice. And the justice would fall on everyone, Jews and Egyptians alike. In every home, a child would die. The only way for a family to escape would involve placing faith in God's sacrificial provision. A lamb would need to be slain and the blood placed on the doors as a sign of faith in God. So there would be death in every home on that particular night, either a dead child or a dead lamb.

When the justice was meted out, either it fell on your family...or you took shelter under the “substitute”, which was the blood of the lamb. If you accepted the shelter...if the lamb's blood was evident on your doorway...death **passed over** your family and you were saved. The commemoration of that event throughout the ensuing years became known as Passover and paid tribute to the fact that people were saved on the basis of their faith in the substitute sacrifice.

Why do you think a lamb was chosen as the animal sacrifice to exempt the Jewish people from God's justice? How far back in Scripture do we read of animal sacrifice that pleases God? (See Genesis 4:3-5.) What type of animal is referenced?

What characteristics of a lamb would suggest its suitability for this role of sacrifice? How do these characteristics relate to those of Jesus as the Lamb of God?

The Jewish culture places great value upon tradition and ceremony. The Passover meal, as it was celebrated throughout the centuries, had to be prepared and produced in a certain way. To accurately remember the night of God's justice in Egypt, there were four cups of wine involved in the feast; each cup of wine represented the four different promises of God as outlined in the Scriptures.

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Read: Exodus 6: 6-7

Name the four promises of God to the Israelites in these verses.

The person presiding over the Passover meal would use words from Deuteronomy 26 to bless elements of the meal: the bread, the herbs, the lamb. He would explain that these were symbolic reminders of the Israelite's captivity and deliverance. At four different points during the meal, the presider would stand with a cup of wine and explain the feast's meaning and God's promises:

- Rescue from Egypt
- Release from slavery
- Redemption by God's divine power
- Renewed relationship with God

This third cup came when the meal was almost completely eaten. It accompanied bread and the explanation would be that "This bread is the bread of our affliction, which our fathers ate in the wilderness." Jesus was the "presider" at the Passover meal with His disciples. Imagine their surprise and (perhaps) dismay when He departs from the traditional wording with the third cup of wine. Mark recounts what happened:

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take it, this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' he said to them. 'I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.'"

Jesus is saying that this was the bread of His suffering and His affliction because He was going to bring the ultimate deliverance from bondage. "This is my body, this is my blood" is Jesus' assertion that all of the earlier deliverances through sacrifice were pointing to Himself.

Did the disciples understand these statements at this point? They had been in Jesus' company for three years and it was just the day before His crucifixion. How much do you think they understood? Were they capable of connecting the dots?

The Israelites received the blessing of a **pass over** the night before God redeemed the Israelites from slavery through the blood of lambs on their doorways. The disciples' commemorative Passover meal was eaten the night before God redeemed the world from sin and death through the blood of Jesus. Bread, wine and lamb were all traditional elements of the Passover meal. So Jesus' particular celebration departed from the script in another way. There is reference to the bread and wine, but where is the lamb? Not one of the four gospels mentions a main course.

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What kind of Passover would be celebrated without a lamb?

Think back to Jesus' baptism. What did John the Baptist say when He saw Jesus for the first time?

Read John 1:29.

There was no lamb on the table because the Lamb of God was at the table.

When Jesus says, "This is my body...this is my blood...poured out", he is telling the disciples that He is the one that Isaiah and John talked about. "I'm the Lamb of God to which all the other lambs pointed, the Lamb that delivers from bondage and takes away the sin of the world."

The Passover meals celebrated in Jewish culture are, of course, actual meals. It is not enough that a lamb is placed on the table. It has to be eaten, it has to be taken in. In the same way, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we need to "take in" the death of Christ for ourselves and make it personal. "This is the real food I need – Christ's unconditional commitment to me." It is a meal.

The Passover is a family meal. The Jewish people gather their families and enjoy the feast and commemoration with them. When Jesus celebrated with His disciples, he was creating an altogether new family. You take in the Lord's Supper with brothers and sisters who are coming together because they have been saved by Jesus Christ. This bond is so transforming that it creates a basis for unity as strong as that felt by people who have been raised together. We are family.

How does your life as a Christian in 2015 mirror the life of an emancipated Israelite?

Imagine you were in Egypt just after that first **pass over**. If you stopped Israelites in those days and said, "Who are you and what is happening here?" they might say "I was a slave, under great bondage, but I was offered shelter under the blood of the lamb on the doorway. Death passed over me and I was saved. My family and I are following God to the promised land!" That is exactly what you can say today. By trusting in Jesus' substitute sacrifice, we are on our way to the promised kingdom of God.

Come join your family at the meal.

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