

We adore You, O Lord, and we praise and glorify Your holy resurrection. For behold, by the wood of Your cross, joy has come into all the world.

Of the four Gospels, John is especially focused on showing how our Lord fulfills the worship of ancient Israel: its priesthood and sacrifices, its temple and feasts. Already in chapter 2 we are taught that the true temple is Jesus' own body. In chapter 4 Jesus teaches that true worship of the Father is not on this mountain or that, but wherever He Himself is. In chapter 6, Jesus reveals Himself as the bread come down from heaven to give life to the world, and we are told this is at the time of Passover. In chapter 7, at the Feast of Booths, Jesus sets Himself forth as the source of the living water of the Spirit.

Standing as bookends to all this, however, is John the Baptist's identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the fulfillment of the two animals sacrificed on the Day of Atonement, one offered to the Lord, its blood shed as a sin offering, the other – the sins of the people placed upon it by the high priest – sent out into the wilderness, bearing the sins away. Already at the beginning, Jesus is identified as the sin-bearer and sacrifice.

Then today, at the other end of John's Gospel, as our Lord is brought to Pilate, we hear about a concern for purity. The chief priests, already pre-determined to kill Jesus since the raising of Lazarus, having resorted to false witnesses, and unable to refute Jesus' claims on the basis of the Scriptures but still unwilling to believe in Him, are concerned about ritual purity! Pilate is a Gentile, and they want to be able to eat the Passover feast. They do not want to be defiled.

This could have been a concern for Gentiles in general being unclean, or the risk of leaven, what was to be avoided at Passover. They fear a foreigner's court, but are not at all afraid of shedding the innocent blood of Christ, not only their own kinsman, but their God! Pilate proclaims Jesus as innocent, spotless, they cry for Him to be executed as a criminal. The nation of priests, called to live under God as their king, would rather claim pagan Caesar as their king, than any association with Jesus and His reign. The irony is so thick you could choke on it.

The Passover meal was eaten the evening before, had to be completed by 6 am on Friday. We are told by John that they came to Pilate in the "**early morning**." They are hoping for a quick trial, get Jesus sent off to death, so they can swiftly return home to eat the meal they have been putting off to get Jesus dead and done with. Pilate, however stymies them. He takes longer to pass sentence than expected. In the Book of Numbers, God had actually provided a way for those defiled by ritual impurity or traveling to keep the Passover a month later.

They could just as well have moseyed on in, sure, be defiled for the official celebration, but then keep the feast later. But they are so hell-bent, literally, on Jesus' destruction, and so obsessed with their perfect outward righteousness, that they neglect their own scriptures, and thus come under the penalty given right after God's provision for a later celebration: "**But if anyone who is clean and is not on a journey fails to keep the Passover, that person shall be cut off from his people because he did not bring the LORD's offering at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin**" (Num 9:13).

Here, the irony turns delicious. Through their evil, their unbelief and their falling under condemnation, the Lord's offering is brought at the appointed time. All that the prophets had foretold is accomplished. The final Passover sacrifice is offered by the sacrifice Himself. Thus John says that the manner of Jesus' death, not by His bones being broken as the two thieves, fulfills the Scriptures, "**Not one of His bones will be broken,**" citing the instructions for the Passover Lamb given in Exodus 12 and Numbers 9.

John's Gospel shows us the true Atonement and the true Passover. More pointedly, he shows us wherein we find true purity. This is not just a study of neat connections between biblical texts and events. You are bid in all this to see the answer to your sin and shame, where it is that God sets you free and provides life with Him. The priests and scribes knew their hatred and malice, but sought to nurse it in their hearts. They clung to their hypocrisy rather than the Lord who came to take it away and provide free righteousness in Himself.

The lesson for us is first a warning: do not do as they did. Do not trust in your outward holiness while nursing inward impurity and filth in your heart. Do not hold on to whatever grievance whether in anger or hurt, keeping it back and hidden. Through John's testimony, the Spirit holds forth the most beautiful invitation. What the worship of Israel of Old and of the New Testament show us is that you cannot atone for yourself. You cannot take away or deal with your faults, your sins, your hurts. God provides for it. God Himself has come to bear the cost, and to give the remedy.

See today, lifted up, given into death and shed, set before you, the One who carries your sin, pays for it, and in whom you are clean and free. He is not only thrust into an unclean Gentile house, or set amid the lowest of criminals, He, the spotless Lamb, has taken upon Himself the sin of the world. He who is life itself has entered into death. He counts none of it as too beneath Him, but willingly bears it all, and none of it, not the ritual impurity of Pilate's headquarters, not the hatred and injustice of men, not the wounds or pain, not the sin of all humanity placed upon Him, not even death and the grave, can overcome Him. In Him, then, you too are more than conquerors. In Him you are pure. In Him you are forgiven and free. In Him you live.

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