

The Lord's Last Passover

Communion Meditation, June 6, 2010

We have been looking at 8 pictures of God found in the song of Moses and the Israelites during these past Sundays. This song was originally sung just after Moses led the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry ground and the Egyptian army perished as they tried to follow them across with the waters crashing back on top of them. The song was later written down for posterity by Moses as he composed the 15th chapter of the book of Exodus.

There is a Jewish celebration that was originally connected with the Exodus that has been continuously celebrated for over 3,500 years now. Many feel that this is actually the oldest holiday in the world. This Jewish celebration is called the Passover. Even today as it is celebrated, it commemorates the last plague that brought release to the Israelites from their slavery. When the angel of death came to Egypt and passed over the Jewish homes that had the lamb's blood sprinkled around their doors, Pharaoh and the Egyptians, crushed by the grief of losing every firstborn in Egypt, finally released control over the nation of Israel. Ever since that day, the Passover meal is a reenactment of that first meal that Jewish families ate together preparing for their departure from Egypt.

It is not just a coincidence that the Lord Jesus Christ chose a Passover celebration to institute the first communion service. Nor is it happenstance that the Lord Jesus Christ gave his life in payment for our sins during the Passover celebration. For the Passover was not only a celebration of a deliverance that happened in the past, but for some 1,500 years it was a picture of a deliverance that was going to take place in the future. As we have been looking at 8 pictures of God found in Moses' song of Exodus 15 and will conclude this series next week, the Lord willing, I thought it would be appropriate this morning for us to look at the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ that was found in that Passover event that immediately preceded the deliverance by the Red Sea. How does the Passover picture the Lord Jesus Christ and his redemptive work upon the cross of Calvary that we celebrate here in this communion service?

1. The Passover meal pictured the Lord Jesus Christ in several specific ways. The food for the Passover meal was given in some detail. The Israelites were not permitted to just make their favorite meal to eat. Rather, the items for the meal were specified by Moses. READ Exodus 12:1-11

EX 12:1 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ² "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³ Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ⁴ If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must

share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat.⁵ The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.⁶ Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.⁷ Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.⁸ That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.⁹ Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire--head, legs and inner parts.¹⁰ Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it.¹¹ This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's **Passover**.

*The meat of the Passover meal was to be a lamb. And not just any lamb. This was to be a lamb that was a year old and a lamb that was without any defect whatsoever. In fact, this lamb was to be chosen on the 10th day of the month and observed for 4 days until the 14th day of the month so that it was seen to be without defect. It was the blood of this lamb that was to be spread around the door of the Israelites house as a protection for the family when the angel of death went through the camp. The meat of the lamb was to be roasted not boiled.

*There were to be bitter herbs that would be eaten with the meal.

*And the bread was to be made without any yeast.

Now it is not a coincidence that John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God who takes upon himself the sins of the world before he baptized him. For the specifics that Moses gave to the Israelites for their meal were clear pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Just as the lamb was to be observed to be without any defect so that it could be a worthy lamb for the sacrifice, so Jesus Christ was without any sin whatsoever. He lived a life of around 33 years here on this earth proving himself to be a worthy sacrifice for sin.

*Just as the bitter herbs not only brought spice to the meal but also pictured the hardship of the Israelites slavery in Egypt, so the Lord Jesus Christ had to suffer and endure great hardship as he became the sin sacrifice for us.

*And just as the bread was made without yeast because of the haste with which the Israelites had to flee but also because yeast is a symbol of sin in the Bible so the bread had to be pure like the meat. This also pictured the sinless nature of the Lord Jesus Christ who would take that very Passover bread and use it as a symbol of his body when he said of the bread, *this is my body which is broken for you*.

And there have even developed some additional specifications concerning the bread that is used in the Passover meal that further picture Christ. The Jewish Matzah bread that is used must meet 4 characteristics in order to be Kosher. It must be without any yeast whatsoever; it must be pierced all the way through; it must have visible stripes on it; and it must be baked until its surface blisters and bruises. These are very ancient regulations that have been handed down to the Jewish people by tradition. But each of these obviously picture the Lord Jesus Christ. He was totally without sin; his hands and feet would be pierced on the cross of Calvary; his back would be striped by the Roman whip; and his body would be bruised by the beating that it received. When Jesus lifted that bread at his last Passover meal here on this earth, saying, *this is my body which is broken for you*, little did his disciples know how meaningful that symbolism really was.

2. But there is also a 2nd way in which it was most appropriate for Jesus to use the Passover meal to institute our Communion Service. Whereas the Passover was Israel's means to be freed from their slavery, so Christ's work on the cross is our means to be freed from our slavery to sin.

The whole purpose of the original Passover meal was to prepare the Israelites to leave Egypt. 9 plagues had already taken place, but Pharaoh's heart was still hardened. God knew that the 10th plague would finally break his will. That plague was the death of all the firstborn in Egypt. This would include Pharaoh's firstborn child as well. God knew that this last plague would create a window of opportunity for the Israelites to leave. But the Israelites had to be ready to move quickly. For Pharaoh's pride and will were so strong that he would quickly change his mind. So God instituted that first Passover meal. The food would provide the strength needed for the journey out of Egypt. And the lamb would provide the blood for protection when the angel of death made his rounds. So the Passover became the physical means of the Israelites being delivered from their slavery in Egypt. This is the reason for Jewish people observing this holiday even to this day as a reminder of the time when they were freed from their slavery to become an independent nation.

So the cross is our Passover in that it was the event that brought our freedom from sin and the fear of death. When the Lamb of God gave his life upon the cross of Calvary, Satan and Death were defeated and the penalty of sin was paid for in full.

It is no surprise then that the Lord Jesus Christ chose a Passover feast as the time of his sacrifice for sin on the cross of Calvary. Because Jesus died for us, we needn't fear death in the future. Because Jesus died in our place, we will never have to suffer the wrath of God for our sins. Whereas the Israelites celebrate their physical freedom in the Passover feast, we as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ celebrate our spiritual freedom whenever we partake in the Communion feast.

3. Finally, just as the Passover celebration looks forward to a time in the future when God will finally and completely deliver his people, so every communion service looks forward to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is an interesting feature of the Jewish Passover feast that is often overlooked. No matter how many family members and guests are present to celebrate the Passover, there is always one more table setting and chair that are placed at the table. In fact, this lone table setting usually has the most elaborate china and crystal. This table setting is for Elijah should he choose to return in fulfillment of God's promise. The Old Testament ends with the promise, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes." (Mal. 4:5) Just in case God chooses to fulfill this promise, there is a place setting for Elijah at every Jewish Passover celebration. So the Passover celebration looks forward to the fulfillment of God's promise in the future.

So each Communion service looks forward to the promise of Christ's return. God we are commanded in God's word to celebrate this table of the Lord until the Lord Jesus Christ comes back for us. As Jesus Christ was leaving this earth, ascending back into heaven, a promise was given that he would one day return in like manner. At that time, he will take all of his children to be with him in heaven forever. We will no longer need symbols to remind us of him for we will have the real person of the Lord Jesus Christ. So the Passover celebration was a most appropriate time for Jesus to institute the Communion service for both not only have a backward look, but they both also have a look forward to the fulfillment of God's promises in the future.

So as we come to this table this morning, we remember the sacrifice that the spotless Lamb of God made for our sins, we celebrate the fact that we have been freed from slavery into newness of life, and we look forward to that day when the Lord Jesus Christ will return fulfilling his promise to us.