

In the Upper Room

Luke 22:7-20

A bright melon moon was inching its way up over the Mount of Olives. High on a pinnacle of the temple, a watchman stood staring over the eastern gate at it.

Finally, the moon was clear of the line of trees, swimming a sea of early evening stars. So the watchman raised a curved ram's horn to his lips and blew a long trumpet blast that echoed down the winding streets of Jerusalem.

Families sat in the flickering orange light of oil lamps, listening out open windows for the watchman's trumpet. And when they heard it, they knew exactly what it meant.

At least they thought they did. For centuries Jews had celebrated the spring supper of roast lamb and bitter herbs. And everyone was sure this Passover would be like all the others.

But they were wrong. Never before had there been a Passover like this one. It was the Seder supper God's people had been waiting for since Egypt and the doorways of their slave shacks were slopped with lamb's blood.

Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Verse 7

There is double meaning in that simple statement. Yes, it was the time the Law commanded Jewish families to sacrifice a lamb.

That was not all it was, though. It was also the time the Lamb of God had to be sacrificed. It was the Seder of all Seders

It was the end of the old and the beginning of the new.

The Preparation

Luke's careful account begins earlier that day, when the sun was still high overhead and evening was hours away. Even then, the disciples' minds were all on Passover. And so was the Lord's.

The time had come to prepare for the Seder supper. So the Savior selected two of the Twelve. *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."Verses 8-12*

There was nothing supernatural about the way the disciples found the upper room. But there was a strange air of secrecy about it all. Sometime earlier, Jesus had made arrangements with a man in the city. He even gave the man a way to identify himself.

Women usually carried water pots. So a man carrying a water pot on a busy street stood out in stark contrast. That was what Peter and John were to look for.

And they left and found everything just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. Verse 13

There was a reason for the secrecy that shrouded the Savior's assignment for Peter and John. Passover supper in a private room would be the perfect place for the priests' plot. They could easily capture Christ there without upsetting the crowds.

And that would never do. It was imperative that He celebrate this last Passover and the first Communion with His disciples before His suffering started.

And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;" Verse 15

Jesus knew Judas was watching and waiting for an opportunity to have Him arrested. So He kept the place secret. Indeed, even the disciples who prepared the place did not know where it was until they met the man. And Judas' plot was foiled.

There is an important lesson in the way our Lord protected both Himself and His disciples. The Savior started by giving His disciples specific instructions.

He expected them to believe Him. But that is not all. He also demanded that they trust His wisdom enough to obey Him.

That is precisely how our Savior would keep us safe. It is also His perfect plan to enrich our lives and bring His blessings to our family and our church. Indeed, there is no other way.

We must believe and obey God's Word.

The Passover

Later that evening in a green and golden twilight, Jesus led His disciples to the guest room. It was time for Passover.

It was an ancient feast, instituted by Moses in Egypt. It looked backward with praise and forward with promise.

First, it recalled the night an angel of death swept like a desert wind through Egypt, killing the firstborn child in every family. That night, God was determined to protect His people.

So He commanded His people to smear lamb's blood on the doorposts and lintels of their slave shacks. When the angel of death saw the blood, he would pass over that house and everyone inside would live.

Each spring on the 15th day of Nisan, the Jews commemorated that night. They sacrificed a lamb and ate unleavened bread because their forefathers left Egypt so quickly there was no time for bread dough to rise.

Also, they ate bitter herbs. That was a to remind them of the bitterness of their bondage as slaves under pharaoh's whip.

John and Peter spent the afternoon preparing for the feast. They had to buy a lamb at the temple market and have a priest sacrifice it for them. But that was not their first task.

First, they had to perform a ritual search of the upper room for any shred of leaven or yeast. Only after it had been removed from the banquet room could the lamb be slain, roasted and eaten.

...on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses...Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; Exodus 12:15,19

Passover and the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed it also looked forward to Cross. Just as the Baptist once said, the lamb was a symbol for God's Son.

He was and is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And in the Bible, leaven is symbol for sin. So, just as Jesus was without sin, there could be no leaven in the house where the slain lamb was eaten.

Finally, the feast was also an object lesson: a spiritual story in symbols. Even today, each Passover Jewish children make a game of searching for leaven before the supper begins. And there is an important lesson in that.

Before we can place personal trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and our loving Lord, we must search for any shred of sin in our lives. With God's help, we must sift our hearts for any lust or larceny that might lurk there.

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24 (KJV)

We cannot trust in the Savior's suffering and appropriate His payment for our sin until we complete that process. We must first search out every sin and lust and forever put them behind us.

Christ cannot and will not forgive any sins we cling to. So we simply must repent. That means we must transform our thinking. That which we once considered pleasure must become poison. And what we once loathed we must choose to love.

In the upper room, the Redeemer reclined at a table for the Seder supper. He had done so every year of His life on earth. But he would not do so again. And neither would His disciples.

"I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." Verses 16-18

The Passover was a time for Jews to look back and both praise and thank God for freeing their forefathers from the slave shacks and slime pits of Egypt. But it was also a time to look forward.

Like the rest of the Moses' Law it was a shadow of God's precious promise.

...the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Hebrews 10:1

Every Passover lamb was a celebration of the Lord's promise to send His Son. But now the promise was reality. The Lamb of God had come. He was sitting at the table with His disciples.

And before the sun set again, He would do what the Law never could. He would pay the highest of all possible prices to purchase purity and perfection for all of mankind.

It was indeed time for the Passover Lamb to be sacrificed.

The Propitiation

In the Upper Room, the Savior celebrated the last Passover and the first Communion. And the disciples had carefully prepared for the Passover meal. But not for the first Communion.

So, Jesus simply took some Passover bread and wine. That is how we know the bread was flat and unleavened.

And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Verse 19

Our Savior spoke in symbols. But this was not the first symbol Jesus used to describe Himself.

I am the door; John 10:9

I am the true vine, John 15:1

Our Lord was not being literal then. And neither was He literal in the upper room.

Indeed, the disciples knew the flat bread they all ate was not actually Christ's body. After all, He was sitting right in front of them. So it had to be a symbol, both for them and for us.

The unleavened bread was and is a reminder that God's sinless Son carried all of our sins in His physical body. Nailed to a cross, He paid the full and final price for our sins.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; 1 Peter 2:24

Passover praised God for freeing slaves. And Communion does the same thing. Like the Jews, we look back in gratitude. We remember how our loving Lord laid down His life that we might be free from slavery to sin.

It is a time to remember how priceless and precious our Savior was and is. And it is a time to renew our resolve to live for Him.

Seder celebrants shared four cups of wine. And no one knew which one Jesus used for the first Lord's Supper.

And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." Verse 20

One of the Passover cups was called the cup of gratitude. And I like to think that is the cup our Savior passed around the table.

After all, the Lord's Supper is a time to remember that it took warm blood from the body of God's sinless Son to deliver us from sin and Satan. But that is not all it is.

In the shadow of Mount Sinai, Moses read God's Law to all of Jacob's descendants. He read the Lord's requirements and the blessings that flow from full obedience. At the same time, he read the curses that accompany disobeying God's Law.

Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." Exodus 24:7-8

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. And both of them must freely and willingly agree to it.

That is how it was in Sinai. Through Moses, God proclaimed His willingness to enter into a covenant of works with His people.

Then all the people gathered there voiced their agreement. Finally, to confirm that the

covenant had been made, Moses sprinkled blood over the crowd.

That covenant of works came to an end when Christ died. So in the upper room, our Savior celebrated the last Passover. Then He instituted a new ceremony to celebrate a new covenant.

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt,” Jeremiah 31:31-32

The blood of a lamb confirmed the old covenant. And the blood of the Lamb of God does the same for the new covenant.

Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. Hebrews 7:22

The new covenant is better in every way. It is not based upon what weak and wavering human beings do. It is built upon the unshakeable foundation of what God Himself has already done.

Christ completely purchased salvation for anyone and everyone who wants to be free and forgiven. All we have to do is believe the message that Jesus really did pay for all our sins on the cross.

We must also confess our sins and commit our lives to Jesus as our Lord, offering Him all our aims and affections. When we do that, we are adopted as the Creator’s children and heirs.

And God’s own Holy Spirit comes to live within us. He changes us and empowers us to live lives that honor our Redeemer and reflect His purity and perfection.

When He broke the bread and offered it to His disciples, Jesus said we are to do this in remembrance of Me. But that verb really means we are to keep on, continually and constantly doing it.

We are to keep on eating Communion bread and drinking Communion wine in remembrance of our Redeemer. But that is not all we are to keep on doing.

We are also to constantly and continually trust only and ever and always in Jesus Christ as our crucified Savior and risen Lord. After all, salvation is much more than a one-time commitment.

It is a walk of faith and commitment to Christ. It is living each day, each hour and each moment loving the Lord who loved us so much, He sacrificed His body and blood for us.

It is living out our commitment to Christ.