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Sermon Summary #43

Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been Sacrificed!

Mark 14:12-25

The least enjoyable responsibility that comes with pastoral ministry is, as you might guess, performing a **funeral service**. I've never talked to anyone yet who says that he relishes the opportunity of conducting a funeral. I'd be worried about him if he did.

As you can well imagine, I've encountered a wide variety of requests on the part of family members. One lady who was like a grandmother to me while growing up requested that I proclaim the gospel from John 3:16. That's all she wanted. Another lady, knowing that her time was short, wanted me to speak directly to her surviving children and to comfort them with the knowledge that she was now reunited in heaven with her Christian husband and their father. I once had the family of a non-Christian insist that I assure everyone present that their deceased family member was in heaven. I refused. They found someone else to perform the service. My mother has played the organ at countless funerals, one in particular that comes to mind. Before he died, the deceased had requested that, when the people passed by the casket, she play Home on the Range! Home on the Range is one thing, but on the pipe organ? Yes, she complied with his request.

I could go on with other stories, but I trust you get my point. I mention this only to say that *what Jesus requested, indeed commanded, his followers and friends to do subsequent to his death is nothing short of shocking!* It's one thing to desire that your memory be preserved by your loved ones and that they continue to honor and esteem you throughout the remainder of their lives. You see this all the time at cemeteries where people have their photographs somehow embedded into their headstones or some other piece of memorabilia permanently affixed to the gravesite.

But it is altogether something else to command that your friends, family, and followers gather together regularly at a meal not only in your name but with you as the sole and exclusive focus. We all want to be remembered, we'd all like to leave behind something of a legacy, but Jesus commanded his followers, every time they broke bread together, to make him the central point of their celebration and to recall and re-tell his life and death.

Were anyone to make this request of me prior to their death, I would probably conclude that the proximity of their demise had afflicted them with delusions of grandeur and megalomania. Yet, this is precisely what Jesus commanded that each of his followers do in memory of him! In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul recites the very words of Jesus that he spoke on the night of his betrayal: "***Do this in remembrance of me!***" (vv. 24-25).

What Jesus instituted by commandment on that evening goes by many names: the Lord's Supper, Communion (1 Cor. 10:16), the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 10:21), the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42), and the Eucharist (*eucharisteo*, Mark 14:23). Since Roman Catholics refer most often to the Eucharist, Protestants have tended to shy away from that word. But I like it!

If we are going to understand why this so-called sacrament or ordinance of the church is important, we must take note of the Jewish background from which it came, namely the Passover. What is Passover?

Passover

I learned about Passover as a child while watching Cecil B. DeMille's film, *The Ten Commandments*. One of the more memorable scenes was the depiction of the 10th and final plague that fell upon Egypt, in consequence of which Pharaoh finally let the people of Israel go free. In this plague, an angel of death, called "the destroyer" in Exodus 12:23, is dispatched by God to inflict death upon the first born children of Egypt. In fact, even the firstborn of the livestock were struck down.

There's no indication that "the destroyer" was visible, yet DeMille portrayed it as a bluish-gray mist that descended from the heavens and floated through the streets of the city, wreaking its deathly havoc on the Egyptian households.

How did the Jewish people survive? Listen to the instructions given to Moses and Aaron, as found in **Exodus 12:21-28** . . .

This event is of more than mere historical interest to us as Christians. The reason why this incident is so crucial is that it is against the background of Passover that Jesus interpreted and explained the meaning of his death for us. Our Lord's death did not occur in a historical or theological vacuum but was in fact the ultimate fulfillment of everything the Passover celebration was designed to teach. *The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5:7 declares that "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." In other words, it is because the blood of Christ is applied not to the doorposts of our homes but to our hearts, through faith, that the wrath of God passes over us.*

In the passage we read a moment ago we saw the preparations that were made for the last Passover. Jesus gave his disciples instructions on how to obtain a room and all the necessary elements for their celebration of this feast. We see this in 14:12-16.

People often ask if Jesus might have met this anonymous man at an earlier time and thus arranged with him in advance to make available a room for him and his disciples. The argument is that Jesus was aware of the plot by Jewish leaders to arrest and kill him, so he took

precautions to insure his safety and thus avoid a premature arrest. But I'm more inclined to believe that it was God the Father who, without prior notice, sovereignly stirred up the heart of a man to leave home with a pitcher of water at precisely the right moment and likewise inclined his heart to be generous in providing Jesus and the disciples with access to the upper room.

I think the reason that neither the house nor its owner are named, and the fact that Jesus sent only Peter and John to accomplish this task, is because he did not want Judas Iscariot to get wind of where they would be lest he tip off the religious leaders.

Some think that this anonymous man with the jar of water was in fact *the father of Mark*, the same Mark who wrote the gospel we are studying. Now here's where it gets interesting, even though this is pure speculation. Later in Mark 14, in vv. 51-52, we read that there was a young man who was present in the Garden of Gethsemane, wearing only a linen cloth. Some have suggested that after the Passover meal Judas and the Roman soldiers returned to the upper room in the home of Mark's father to arrest Jesus, thinking that he likely was still there. They didn't know that he had left and had gone with his disciples to Gethsemane. The young boy Mark was possibly awakened by Judas and the soldiers and quickly threw a linen cloth around himself and raced out into the night to warn Jesus of what was coming! In other words, *the young man mentioned in vv. 51-52 may have been Mark himself*. But we can't be sure.

The upper room, regardless of who owned it, was "furnished and ready" (v. 15). In other words, there would have been a table in the middle around which was a couch or cushions in the shape of a horseshoe on which the guests would recline. All the provisions for the Passover, such as unleavened bread, wine, and bitter herbs would have been there.

Most important of all, the disciples would have made sure that a suitable Passover lamb had been obtained.

During the afternoon, they would have made their way to the Temple to purchase a lamb, but not just any old lamb. The instructions originally given in Exodus 12:5 are unmistakable – "Your lamb shall be *without blemish*, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats." The disciples would have carefully inspected the lamb, looking for any physical defect or blemish. The lamb had to be spotless and as perfect as possible: even as Jesus, our Passover lamb, was morally spotless and perfect, with no blemish of sin or guilt whatsoever!

After its throat was cut the blood would be caught in a basin by the priest. The fat and certain parts would be flayed and burned, the remainder then taken by the disciples to the upper room.

At some point during the Passover meal, some believe at the very beginning, Jesus spoke the words that we read in vv. 18-21 . . . Two observations are called for:

- (1) All of the disciples, together with Jesus, dipped their bread into the same bowl. This

surely heightens the horror of the betrayal that is soon to come, since sharing a meal with someone was a sign of fellowship and mutual love and commitment. Jesus will not be betrayed by an outsider, a Roman soldier, or a Pharisee, but someone they all trusted; a friend!

(2) Verse 21 is stunning and the implications are breathtaking. Here we see the convergence of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God has ordained the death of his Son. Notice: “the Son of Man goes as it is written of him” (v. 21a). This is inevitable. It has been prophesied. It has been written of many times in the OT Scriptures. There’s no way this can be avoided. God has ordained and decreed it from eternity past. Yet, on the other hand, judgment (“woe!”) will come upon Judas Iscariot by whom he is betrayed!

But how can God hold Judas morally responsible for the betrayal of Jesus and judge him for it if the betrayal and death of Jesus were set and certain? See Acts 4:27-28. The fact that Judas’s decision to betray Jesus was part of God’s plan from eternity past does not in the least diminish the moral responsibility that Judas must bear for his action.

The Passover meal itself is quite instructive, but also quite complex and controversial. But most agree that it consisted of four parts, each of which was centered around the drinking of four cups of wine. I’m not going to go into detail about how the meal unfolded or how it was observed, but three points should be noted:

First, just before the people drank of the second cup of wine, the youngest son present would ask his father why this night in particular, with all its special customs and food, was different from all other nights. His father would respond by explaining the significance of Israel’s redemption and deliverance from Egypt.

We must remember that the exodus was not merely an inspiring tale from the distant past. It was not some historical curiosity or gentle stroll down memory lane for the Jewish people. It was hardly an empty nostalgic wish for better days gone by. The redemption of Israel from Egypt and her exodus from captivity was THE EVENT in Jewish history and life. This was the story of how the nation was born and redeemed from bondage. This was the story of God’s faithfulness to his covenant promise. This explains why “we” are God’s people (so said the father). This is what gives meaning to our identity. This was not merely a shallow or empty tradition but a declaration of calling and identity.

Surely at some point in the meal, perhaps here, the disciples were beginning to grasp the idea this Passover meal was different! Something more than an animal was being sacrificed and commemorated. A new and better exodus was being accomplished: the people of God were now being redeemed, not from physical bondage and slavery in Egypt, but from spiritual bondage and slavery to sin by virtue of the cross of Christ!

Second, in conjunction with the third cup of wine gratitude to God for the gift of bread was expressed. The distribution of bread was usually done in silence, but that night in the upper room the solemnity of the moment was shattered by Jesus. In an utterly amazing statement, he directs the attention of his disciples away from Moses, away from Egypt, away from the deliverance of Israel out of bondage, and to himself!

“This is MY body!” (v. 22). This bread symbolizes me and the offering up of my body as the ultimate Passover sacrifice.

Later during that portion of the meal Jesus took the cup of wine and once again redirected the focus of everyone present away from the OT celebration, away from the blood of the Passover lamb that was applied to the doorposts of each Jewish household, and to himself.

“This is MY blood, of the new covenant!” (v. 24). Did you hear that? A “new” covenant is being instituted. The “old” covenant of Moses is at an end. God is establishing a new covenant with his people, not through the blood of bulls, goats, or lambs, but through the blood of THE Passover Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third, the Passover would end with the drinking of a fourth cup of wine. It was most likely concerning this cup that Jesus said what he did in v. 25. Why did Jesus refuse to drink of this fourth cup? Many believe that the answer is found in Exodus 6:6-7. There we read of a four-fold promise of redemption. William Lane explains:

“Jesus had used the third cup, associated with the promise of redemption, to refer to his atoning death on behalf of the elect community. The cup which he refused was the cup of consummation, associated with the promise that God will take his people to be with him. This is the cup which Jesus will drink with his own in the messianic banquet which inaugurates the saving age to come. The cup of redemption . . . strengthened by the vow of abstinence, constitutes the solemn pledge that the fourth cup will be extended and the unfinished meal completed in the consummation, when Messiah eats with redeemed sinners in the Kingdom of God” (508-09).

What is most important for us to see is that the ultimate, once-for-all sacrifice to which all the slain lambs of Passovers past had pointed, has now come! Shadow has given way to substance! Type has given way to antitype! Symbol has given way to reality. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us!

It’s vitally important that you understand what you are doing, what you are saying, what you are confessing when you take the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

When you take the bread in your hand you are saying Yes to all that Jesus Christ has done for you. You are saying Yes to his offer of himself as the only sufficient sacrifice for your sins.

You are saying Yes to his offer of grace and life and love. You are confessing that apart from his sacrificial body symbolized by the bread, you deserve hell. You are confessing your utter and absolute dependence upon him, your total need for what he is doing on your behalf, and the sufficiency of his power to sustain you now and forever.

When you drink from the cup you are affirming loudly and passionately that no work or act or deed can save you, no matter how consistently you perform it, no matter how sincerely you pursue it. You are saying that Christ and Christ alone by his work and act and deed on the cross can save. You are affirming that all hope for the forgiveness of sins and all hope of heaven and eternal life is in his atoning sacrifice, his shed blood, poured out in place of yours. You are affirming that the wrath of God you deserved, he endured in your place.

If you can't say Yes in this way, if you can't affirm all that his death has achieved, you must not partake.

But remember this: if you can heartily and happily say Yes, *merely looking* at the elements of bread and wine isn't enough. *Merely thinking* about the bread and the cup isn't enough. *Merely acknowledging* the theological significance of the Eucharist isn't enough. God commands us to **take and eat and take and drink**.

Why? Because the physical action of eating and drinking symbolizes the spiritual action of believing and trusting in what the elements represent. Just as food and drink are in us by eating and thus nourish and strengthen us physically, so also by ingesting the bread and drinking of the cup Christ is in us by believing and trusting and treasuring and hoping in him.

Let me say something about the mood or attitude with which we celebrate the Eucharist. Do not confuse spiritual sobriety with somberness. **Yes, partaking of the Eucharist is serious, but it is not sad!** The elements lead us to the Cross, but they never leave us there. The elements are also designed to carry us on to an empty tomb and a celebration of the risen Christ and his soon return!

Is it possible then *to be both reverent and to rejoice*? Yes!

Never come to the Lord's Table thinking that by partaking of these elements you are pacifying an angry God. Never come to the Table thinking that by doing so you are transforming an irritable and wrathful God into a joyful and loving one. **The elements are designed to remind us that whatever wrath and anger and righteous judgment that God had toward us as sinners has been forever and eternally endured and satisfied by Jesus!** Is that not cause for joy and celebration and thanksgiving? Yes!

Do not come to the Table beating yourself up over your failures. Do not come berating your soul for all the ways you've failed God. Yes, acknowledge your sins and then rejoice that the body and blood of Jesus have forever secured for you the forgiveness and freedom you so

desperately desire.

Charles Spurgeon wrote this hymn to be sung at communion. It truly expresses the range of appropriate thoughts and emotions that we should experience as we approach the Table:

“Amidst us our Beloved stands,
And bids us view His pierced hands;
Points to His wounded feet and side,
Blest emblems of the crucified.

What food luxurious loads the board,
When at His table sits the Lord!
The wine how rich, the bread how sweet,
When Jesus deigns His guests to meet!

If now with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs, but see not Him,
Oh may His love the scales displace
And bid us view Him face to face.

Our former transports we recount,
When with Him in the holy mount;
These cause our souls to thirst anew,
His marr'd but lovely face to view.

Thou glorious bridegroom of our hearts,
Thy present smile a heaven imparts
Oh lift the veil, if veil there be,
Let every saint Thy glory see.”