

THE LAST PASSOVER

Matthew 26:17-25

Our passage falls neatly into two parts. The first is Jesus' instructions to His disciples about Passover. The second is Jesus' announcement that He would be betrayed by one of them.

Here is our plan for this morning. I want to give you a **brief overview of Passover**. Then we will consider how the Passover in our passage is really **the last Passover**. Lastly, we will see Jesus expose **the fact of His betrayal**, and identify the betrayer before **bringing it home** to us today.

PASSOVER

Let's begin by getting the idea of Passover settled in our minds.

Toward the end of Genesis, the family of Jacob settled in Egypt in relative comfort and abundance. Over time, their circumstances began to change, and after four centuries, they were enslaved under terrible conditions.

Yahweh raised up Moses of the tribe of Levi to deliver the Hebrews from slavery. This deliverance involved several conversations with Pharaoh (the title of the king of Egypt) and ten plagues of judgment, which are found in Exodus 7 to 12. First, water was turned to blood. Then frogs (#2) swarmed over the land, followed by gnats (#3) and flies (#4). Then came pestilence (#5), an epidemic that devastated the livestock of Egypt. Next was an epidemic of boils (#6) among the Egyptian people, followed by hail (#7), locusts (#8), and darkness (#9). These nine judgments came against the Egyptians; they did not affect the Hebrews.

But then came the tenth plague. Yahweh would pass through all of Egypt and put to death the firstborn of every family and among all the livestock. This judgment *would* affect the Hebrews, so Yahweh gave them a means of protection. They were to take a lamb into their home for two weeks, then slaughter that lamb and place its blood on the sides and top of the door to their homes.

13 “And the blood shall be a sign for you
on the houses where you are;
and I will see the blood,
and I will pass over you,
and there shall be no plague among you to destroy you
when I strike the land of Egypt.”

(Exodus 12:13, 2022 LSB)

The Hebrews would not be spared just because they were Hebrew. This time they were under the same judgment as the Egyptians. The Hebrews who took refuge behind the blood of the lamb were spared the judgment of God. What a clear picture of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who dwelt among His people, and behind whose blood sinners may take refuge!

The Lord also instructed them to eat a unique meal. The meat of the slain lamb was to be roasted and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Nothing could be left over until morning; whatever was not eaten was to be burned. They were to eat as though ready to travel at any moment, wearing traveling clothes, sandals on their feet, and staves in their hands.

And, Yahweh said,

14 “Now this day will be a memorial to you,
and you shall celebrate it as a feast to Yahweh;
throughout your generations
you are to celebrate it as a perpetual statute.”
(Exodus 12:14, 2022 LSB)

So, the people of Israel were never to forget how God had delivered them from slavery and had protected them from His righteous judgment.

For centuries the Passover meal was somewhat basic and largely unregulated. Then, about 100 years before Christ, the Jews began to give more and more structure. We have a written document dating to the second century that lays out the ritual of Passover in a very similar way to what is practiced today. It's likely that Jesus and His disciples followed a similar order.

It begins with the table being set with three stacked pieces of unleavened bread (called *matzoh*), bitter herbs, a mixture of fruit and nuts called *charoset*, a roasted egg, a lamb's shank bone (a reminder of the sacrificed lamb), and a vegetable like watercress, parsley, or celery, called *karpas*. A full meal is eaten during Passover, but these items are symbolic and not the full meal.

A blessing is given, and the first of four cups of wine is drunk. Those present ceremonially wash their hands. The watercress or parsley is dipped into salt water and eaten as a reminder of their enslaved ancestors' tears.

Then the middle piece of matzoh, the *afikomen*, is removed and broken in two. The larger of the

two pieces is wrapped in a cloth and hidden until after the meal.

Then the Exodus story is told in conjunction with four questions that are traditionally asked by the youngest child present.

1. Why is *this* night different from all other nights?
2. Why do we eat leavened bread or matzah on all other nights during the year but only matzah on *this* night?
3. Why do we eat all kinds of vegetables on all other nights but bitter herbs on *this* night?
4. Why is it that on all other nights, we eat meat either roasted, marinated, or cooked, but on *this* night, it is entirely roasted?

The second cup of wine is drunk.

Then a full meal is eaten. After the meal, the hidden piece of matzoh, the *afikomen*, is brought out, distributed in olive-sized pieces, and eaten. By the way, Jewish scholars say that *afikomen* comes from one of two words (they aren't sure) meaning either dessert or an after-dinner celebration.

The third cup of wine is drunk, a blessing is said, and the fourth cup of wine is drunk, and Passover is complete.

There is no question that Passover is rich in symbolism, and especially Gospel symbolism.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity, who was broken for us and buried, and then raised after sins had been fully removed. He is the *afikomen*, the “after-dinner celebration,” whose resurrection brought joy to His disciples and all who believe in Him.

Now let's look at our passage.

THE LAST PASSOVER

17 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread

the disciples came to Jesus, saying,

“Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?”

18 And He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him,

‘The Teacher says, “My time is near;
I am keeping the Passover at your house with My disciples.”’
19 And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them;
and they prepared the Passover.
(**Matthew 26:17–19, 2022 LSB**)

What made *this* Passover different was that it was *The Passover* of all Passovers. It was much more a Passover than even the first Passover had been. On that night, Yahweh passed over the houses of His people as long as they were marked with the blood of the lamb. The people themselves weren’t changed at all. But on *this* Last Passover, the blood of the Lamb of God would take away sin and provide for complete regeneration. The First Passover merely shielded the Hebrews from the judgment of God, while the Last Passover removed the cause of judgment, which is sin.

Before the Passover, said, “My time is near.” What time is that? The time when He would fulfill the purpose for which He was sent: to redeem sinners by His blood, take our place on His cross, destroy the works of the devil, glorify the Father, and purchase a people for His own possession.

During the meal, Jesus made another announcement.

BETRAYAL ANNOUNCED

Matthew 26:20-25

20 Now when evening came,
Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples.
21 And as they were eating, He said,
“Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.”
22 And being deeply grieved,
they each one began to say to Him,
“Surely not I, Lord?”
23 And He answered and said,
“He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl
is the one who will betray Me.
24 The Son of Man is going, just as it is written of Him;
but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!
It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”
25 And Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said,
“Surely not I, Rabbi?”
Jesus said to him, “You yourself said it.”

(Matthew 26:20–25, 2022 LSB)

God can accomplish anything He likes in any way that He likes. Jesus would die in the place of sinners, but His death came through specific means that God had prophesied. It is those fulfillments of prophecy that show that Jesus was not some random guy making bizarre claims but the Son of God in human flesh. And, as we know, some of those prophecies concern Jesus being rejected and abused by people. Isaiah 53:3 says that He would be despised and rejected, and He was. And, Psalm 41:9 says, He would be betrayed by a friend:

9 Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
Who ate my bread,
Has lifted up his heel against me.
(Psalm 41:9, 2022 LSB)

Jesus' announcement shocked His disciples. The eleven immediately asked Him, "Surely not I, Lord!" It's interesting that they didn't doubt Him at all. Not one of them says, "You know, it's been a hard week for You, and You're really tired, but there's no need to be paranoid." No, they believed Him. And each one was horrified that *he* might be the betrayer: "Surely not I, Lord!"

He narrowed the twelve down to the few who had shared His bowl of food – with that sized group, multiple bowls of each item would be placed on the table. "He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me."

Jesus goes on to say,

24 "The Son of Man is going [or *going away*], just as it is written of Him;
but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!
It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."
(Matthew 26:24, 2022 LSB)

As we talked about in the Matthew 23 sermons, "woes" are bad things. It is a cry of anguish or a declaration of horror. Most of the time, it describes the misery experienced now and in eternity by those who are under the wrath of God. Jesus' betrayer would suffer anguish and horror as a result of his treachery. In fact, Jesus says, "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

And then, finally, Judas speaks up:

25 And Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?"

Jesus said to him, “You yourself said it.”
(Matthew 26:25, 2022 LSB)

There is nothing subtle about Matthew’s words. Judas – who was in the middle of betraying Him and who would leave in just a moment to carry out the next step of that betrayal – said, “Surely I am not betraying you!”

What did the other disciples say? “Surely not I, *Lord*.” What does Judas say? “Surely not I, *Rabbi*.” Perhaps this reveals Judas’ justification for his actions. As far as Judas was concerned, no matter what Jesus said or did, He was just a *teacher* and nothing more. Over the years of His ministry, Jesus had become more precious to the eleven, and they grew in their understanding of His identity. His value to Judas never changed. He was worth whatever Judas could steal from Him or, in the end, whatever Judas could get by betraying Him.

BRINGING IT HOME

Let’s bring this home to our lives today.

First, regarding Passover, the Hebrews were not saved because of their identity. They faced the same judgment as the Egyptians. The Lord provided them shelter from that judgment. They could take refuge behind the blood of a lamb, and He would pass over them. But make no mistake – a man who refused to put the blood of the lamb on his doorposts and lintel faced exactly the same judgment as the Egyptians.

In exactly the same way, no one is saved today because their parents were Christians, or because they belong to a church, or by any of their works. Sinners today face the judgment of death. Only those who take refuge behind the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, are spared that judgment. Keep in mind that the blood of the Passover lamb didn’t change anything about the people, while the blood of Jesus Christ changes everything about those who trust in Him.

Second, we see that Judas was not a free agent but was in bondage to sin. Over the years he was with Jesus, Judas heard everything Jesus taught. He saw the great majority of the healings and miracles Jesus performed. He ate the bread and fish that Jesus miraculously multiplied on more than one occasion. Judas was in the boat that day the storm hit, crying out with the others, “Save us, Lord, we are perishing!” He saw Jesus get up and instantly calm the storm.

There is a view that says that if we can give people the answers to their questions and show them

enough evidence, we can persuade them to believe in Jesus. Well, Judas had more than anyone else apart from the other disciples. No one on earth has ever seen or heard more than Judas heard. He didn't believe, not because of a lack of evidence, but because he was a slave to sin. If the Son sets someone free, they will be free indeed (John 8:36). If the Son doesn't set them free, they are utterly powerless to free themselves.

The heart of evangelism is not **persuasion** but **proclamation**. Our task is not to **convince** sinners of the Gospel but to **convey** the Gospel to them with clarity and simplicity. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit,

8 “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;
9 concerning **sin**, because they do not believe in Me;
10 and concerning **righteousness**, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;
11 and concerning **judgment**, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”
(John 16:8–11, 2022 LSB)

The Spirit does this work through our preaching of the Gospel. I think the hardest part of evangelism is telling someone that they are a **sinner**, God is **righteous**, and they face eternal **judgment** for their sins. It is much easier to tell them that they are victims, God is love, and He has a wonderful plan for their life. But that involves editing the Gospel. Jesus spoke at length about human sin, about God's holiness, and the judgment to come. If we don't include those themes, then whatever we are doing, it isn't evangelism.

We are worried that people will not listen if we discuss sin, righteousness, and judgment. And that's true; many will not. In fact, the only ones who will listen are those to whom the Holy Spirit is bearing witness.

Here's the thing. It is the work of the Spirit to enable a sinner to hear the Gospel. It is His work to soften their hearts rather than to resist the Gospel. And it is His work to grant them saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Of course, we will try to persuade someone that Jesus is the Savior they need. But that persuasion is accomplished by declaring the Word of God. After all, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by **the Word of Christ**.” (Romans 10:17, 2022 LSB). Sinners cannot change their own

nature. They must be given the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit. Our part is to open the Scripture to them and trust that the Holy Spirit will cause them to hear, soften their hearts, and grant them faith in Jesus.

Finally, would you consider the greatness of our God in giving the Hebrews a refuge from judgment? That final judgment in Egypt was not merely a judgment against the Egyptians but against sinners. Moses himself would have died under God's judgment had he not put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintels of his house. We all deserve God's eternal judgment. We do not deserve a delay in judgment, much less protection from judgment, and far less a new birth that eliminates the reason for judgment. Yet that is what we have received in Christ. Just as Jesus fulfilled all the sacrifices of the Old Testament system, He fulfilled the Passover for us. He is the Lamb of God who takes away our sin and makes us children of God by adoption.