

“The Big Words of the Bible: Passover”

1 Corinthians 5.6-8

Maundy Thursday, 2006

The Word of God for our sermon meditation on this Maundy Thursday was recorded for our faith and life in St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, the 5th chapter, beginning with this 7th verse Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.”

Tonight we gather in God's house to ponder on a well-known word, one that is especially well known in connection with this night of nights. This night is the night in which our Lord Jesus was betrayed in accordance with the Scriptures, sent forth to be the sacrifice whose body and blood would atone for our sins so that we would be delivered from the plague of sin and death.

Prior to our Lord's arrival in Gethsemane He celebrated the Passover with His disciples for the last time and, in fact, celebrated it as its very fulfillment. The Old Testament Passover was instituted the night that Israel was delivered from the tyranny and slavery of Egypt. In many ways, it was like our 4th of July. On July 4th, Independence Day, we pause to remember the freedoms secured first by our forefathers from the King of England. As a result of the sacrifice and dedication of many, the colonists went from being subjects to being free, no longer under the tyranny of the King.

The Passover was the meal and festival that commemorated Israel's freedom from Egypt. It was the night the Lord required that a male, unblemished, one-year old lamb be slaughtered and its blood spread upon the doorframe so that the angel of death would pass over their homes leaving all inside safe and alive. Every year the Jews were to celebrate the Passover, Israel's independence from Egypt and deliverance from the plague of death, by the slaughter of the lamb and the spilling of its blood.

The word “Passover” is used to first speak of the slaughtered and sacrificed lamb and secondly to speak of the “passing over” without the killing and slaughter of the people. The irony is self-evident. The lamb is slaughtered so as to deliver the people from

the slaughter they would have received had the lamb's blood not covered them and their households.

In truth the Passover was only a precursor, a predictive festival pointing the people to a greater sacrificial Lamb and a greater deliverance from a slaughter and plague of death far worse than any thing we can imagine. The Passover, along with all the other religious feasts and ceremonies of the Jews were pointing the people to look to the Messiah, to the Anointed One of God sent into the world to deliver us from the plague of death and damnation brought on us by sin and Satan. It further fleshed out the Person and work of the Seed of the Woman foretold in the Garden of Eden after the Fall into sin.

This is why St. Paul calls Jesus our Passover in our sermon reading for tonight. He is the very Lamb whose sacrifice, whose slaughter results in rescuing us and shielding us from the plague of death and damnation our sins and transgressions have brought on us. In fact, St. Paul points out that since Jesus is our Passover, as we keep the Lord's Supper, the Feast that is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover Meal, we are to keep it with sincerity and without leaven, without wickedness and without malice.

What exactly does St. Paul mean by these words? The Corinthian believers, you might remember, were a congregation fraught with division, immorality, and sinful troubles of all kinds. On the one hand they were combating their sinful tendencies arising from their Gentile background and on the other they were fighting against Jewish interlopers who sought to get them to follow the Jewish laws and rituals when it came to worship. The Corinthian believers had to deal with all that in addition to the Old Man and his sinful corruption that resides in all the children of Adam.

This is what St. Paul means by the word "leaven" in our text. As God's people we are to do our utmost to see that no leaven, no wickedness from the world around us or from the world of non-Christian religions finds its way into our faith and religious life. We are not to allow any division, any malice, any sin of any sort interfere with our unity and harmony as God's people as we

celebrate the Supper of our Lord lest we sin against Him who is our Passover.

For to sin against the Supper is a most serious and grievous act for, as the Apostle relates later in this Epistle, to misuse the Lord's Supper, to fail and neglect to examine oneself before taking the Lord's Supper and failure to recognize that one is receiving the Lord's very body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Supper, is to sin against the Lord's body and blood and bring judgment on oneself. It is to bring on oneself the very plague of death and damnation for which Christ offered up His body and shed His blood as our Passover on the altar of Calvary's cross.

The people of Israel, you may remember, failed in their observances of the Passover. In time, they began to backslide and as they went after the false gods and idols of the land of Canaan, they began to intermingle the pagan feasts and rituals with the ceremonies and festivals of God. In time the judgment of the Lord came on them for the Lord no longer passed over their sin and visited them with the plague and punishment He warned would be theirs should they forsake Him and His ways.

So St. Paul reminds and warns us this night. Keep the feast without leaven. It doesn't matter whether it was Israel with the Old Testament Passover or the Corinthians and you and me with the Lord's Supper. We are to keep the Lord's Supper with sincerity and without the leaven of the world and of sin. We are to recognize and remember why we approach the altar of God and receive the very body and blood of Jesus in, with, and under the bread and wine. If we do not live our lives with purity and do not recall the Lord's death every time we come to His Table, then we sin and bring the Lord's judgment on ourselves.

And we have failed, haven't we? Even though we know the right teaching, even though we have been taught to examine ourselves so that we confess our sins and receive rightly the Lord's Supper, even though we know we are not to cause division and are to resolve with anyone any offenses that have occurred, we do not always do this. For we too, intermingle the words and ways of the world into our lives and in our hearts. We figure that the words of God are just threats, nothing more and nothing less. If we just

mindlessly approach the Lord's Table, if we take for granted what is really happening here, if we fail to reconcile ourselves with those who have sinned against us, we figure we'll be all right anyway.

Have we forgotten so soon the judgment against Israel? Have we forgotten so soon the Apostle's words and the truth that God's judgment is real and true? For these and all our sins we deserve the angel of death to come and destroy us. We deserve the plague of eternal death and the everlasting captivity of Hell's flames.

This would be our lot were it not for Christ our Passover. For our deliverance and rescue from the plague of eternal death and captivity to sin, Christ became the Passover Lamb for us. He established His Supper knowing He would be sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sins and our deliverance from death and damnation. He was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and led to the slaughter like a lamb. He, though He was without blemish, had laid on Him the sins and transgressions of us all.

So teaches Isaiah in his well known 53rd chapter when he prophesied these words. "And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken." So St. Peter confirmed when he wrote these words. "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

On account of Christ our Passover Lamb who was slaughtered and sacrificed for our sins, we have had our sins forgiven us, even our sins against His Supper and the instructions for observing His Supper. His blood now covers us by faith so that the destruction and end that we should receive is not visited on us. On account of His sacrificial death as our Lamb God has passed over us and does not slaughter us. Like the angel of death passed over the

children of Israel, so has the sentence of death and destruction passed over us so that we are safe and alive, not just now but for eternity.

The blessing is announced and given us each and every time we receive the body and blood slaughtered and sacrificed for our rescue from death and destruction. "Take eat" and "Take drink" the body and blood given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins proclaims and gives to us by the very same words that very forgiveness obtained for us by Christ our Passover Lamb. It declares to us that covered in His blood the only angels that will greet us at death and the return of the Lord are His holy angels to usher us into Heaven's glory. It declares in no uncertain terms that judgment has been served and we will enter, by God's grace, life everlasting where we will sit at the Feast that has no end sin Jesus Christ the Lord is our Passover sacrificed for us and raised never to die again. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+