

Maundy Thursday

28 March, Anno Domini 2024

St. John 13:1-15, 34-35

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Everything changed for the children of Israel on the night of the Passover. After 430 years, many of which were spent in brutal slavery to the pagan Egyptians,, finally, the children of Abraham were going to be delivered and led by God into the Promised Land. This was THE defining moment of their history and would remain so for nearly 1500 years.

But this deliverance would come at a cost. The firstborn of the rebellious and idolatrous Egyptians would lose their lives. After repeated attempts at bringing the Egyptians to repentance, to hear the command of God and heed His Word, God was going to demonstrate with utter clarity that He alone was the Lord. He would bring judgment to bear on the Egyptians. From the cattle in the field all the way up to Pharaoh's own house, death would take the firstborn son and Egypt would learn that their gods were nothing, that their Pharaoh was powerless to save them, that he was a mere man like they were who could not stand against the will of God.

The people of God would be spared but they would be forever reminded that their freedom came at a very bloody cost. A male lamb, a year-old, unblemished would have to be sacrificed. It's life would take the place of the firstborn of Israel. It's blood would cover them so that death would passover because one had already died, blood had already been spilled, a life had already been taken.

Can you imagine being the firstborn that night? Trembling hearts and hands taking up the spilled blood and mopping it onto the doorposts and the lintel, praying to God that the Angel of Death would pass over and spare you. Was it sufficient? Had a blemish been missed and you would perish? It was indeed a terrifying night for God's people as bloodless households all around them, perhaps even of some

Israelites who failed to heed the warning or follow the Lord's instructions and substitute some other kind of offering, were filled with cries of anguish - mothers, wives, and children all weeping bitter tears of sorrow and likely cursing the Pharaoh they once considered a god because he would not stand down even when his magicians finally confessed that they were indeed in a showdown with THE God.

Most certainly the Israelites were filled with rejoicing as they processed out of their captivity. Israelite mothers, wives, and children were bursting with joy because their husbands, sons, and fathers had been spared on account of the blood. But it was a solemn and somewhat muted joy because of the horror of God's wrath that had passed through Egypt that night - a reminder that there is only one God and His patience with unbelief and rebellion does not endure forever.

For very obvious reasons, God had the Israelites remember this mighty act of deliverance every year. It defined who Israel was as a people - those who had been delivered from their bondage and death by God's great mercy. They didn't lift a finger but only stood and beheld the mighty works of God.

And central to their remembrance was the meal that God also instituted as a central part of the sacrifice. The Israelites were to eat that which was sacrificed. This was no more optional than the smearing of the blood. The animal which gave its life for theirs was also to be for their food. And it was this food of unleavened bread and roasted lamb celebrated and received according to God's institution that would serve, not only to bring back the memory of what happened but to actually bring those who ate of it into participation with the first. Subsequent generations, of course, would have no actual memory of the events of the Exodus. But they were, nonetheless, through circumcision and celebrating the Passover, beneficiaries of that great deliverance. They were reminded that they were once in slavery, bound to a wretched death. But no longer because God, in His abundant mercy and faithfulness to His Word, delivered them. To refuse the meal was to refuse participation in the deliverance of which that meal was a central part. It was to reject the sacrifice that was received to spare them.

This was who Israel was and still is, the true Israel - they, we, are those who the Lord brought up out of Egypt and the bondage of slavery with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. And it was precisely in their forgetting of who they were over time and what God had done for them, that they became proud and presumptive upon God. Rather than knowing that they had been made God's people by the sacrificial mercy of God, they believed that they were deserving of deliverance and that God should be thankful that they decided to let Him deliver them. And so, many of them fell in the wilderness without seeing Canaan because God was no more pleased with their idolatry and unbelief than He was with that of the Egyptians.

Thus, on the brink of the greater and final deliverance, the deliverance of humanity from its slavery to sin and death, a deliverance from death which again required the death of the true Lamb, the same Lord instituted another meal, a meal which infinitely surpasses that of the Passover such that the Passover has been done away with. On the night when He was betrayed the Lamb of God, born of the Virgin Mary, the only true substitute for you, took bread and wine and attached the most beautiful and incredible promises them - "Take, eat; this is My Body which is given for you. Drink of this cup, all of you; it is the new testament in My Blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." And that this was done in the immediate context of the Passover is a clear indicator of what was happening. It is as though Jesus said "Since Adam and Eve rebelled against My Word in the garden, you have been in bondage under the tyranny of Satan, in slavery to the sinful desires that course through your corrupted flesh. If you are to go free, if you are to be restored to life and to enter the Promised Land of God's eternal rest, the wages of your sin must be paid in full. The death you have merited under God's righteous wrath must be suffered. I will suffer it. I will offer up my Blood instead of yours. I will die so that the Angel of Death will pass over you and you may be set free to live forever with God. There is no other way. There is no other substitute. All may take shelter in the shadow of my wings. And that this sacrifice may be made yours I am giving to you what I offer, My Body and My Blood as true food and true drink. My flesh will suffer the roasting fire of God's righteous

wrath. My Blood will paint the doorposts of your lips to mark you. I give this food to you to eat often so that your faith in Me might be strengthened, that you may be filled with the assurance of your deliverance, that the terror of your sin would be put to flight, that your conscience may rest in peace even as you make your way through this bitter wilderness of sin and affliction and trial.

“So also by this Sacrament will you be strengthened in fervent love toward one another. I have stooped down in great humility not to be served by you but to serve you, to wash you, to cleanse you, to forgive you. Having thus been loved so now love one another. Do not exalt yourself above one another. Do not deny what I have done for you by refusing forgiveness to one another and even to your enemies. You too were once enemies of God, proud rebels who lusted after the fleshpots of Egypt. But God has had mercy upon you and brought you out of death that you may be His children and sit at His table and feast on His goodness. Do likewise for one another.

“Be warned. If you come to this supper with anger in your heart, if you willfully and unrepentantly remain in your sin, then you have not examined yourself rightly and you do not recognize what it is that I give here hidden under the humility of bread and wine. You do not recognize Me, My Body and My Blood, given for the purpose of forgiveness. And all who eat this Holy Food in such a manner eat and drink only judgment upon themselves. You will suffer the burning and tormenting sickness of your sin which, apart from me, will lead to eternal death.”

Children of God, on this holy night began our exodus from our slavery under the devil’s demonic tyranny. Tonight, though in a few short hours, the Son of God will cry out in agony as His Father forsakes Him, we will with reverent awe and humility lift up songs of rejoicing for the bonds of eternal judgment have been broken. We will eat the sacrifice that has been appointed as God gains victory over all of our false gods. We will lay aside all outward shows of glory and instead glory in the One who laid down His life in service to us that we might have our eternal part with Him. Come. Let us celebrate the paschal feast in sincerity and in truth for it is our deliverance.

In the Name of +Jesus.