

The Passover Lamb by Mark Opperman

Matthew 21:1-21:11

The Passover Lamb

Matthew 21:1-11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 5 "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!" 10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" 11 The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Intro: Palm Sunday is overlooked by many Christians as just another Sunday. I have been guilty of sailing right through it without considering its significance. However, we can see in the Bible that it was a very important day. Palm Sunday was really all about Passover, because that is when people would bring their Passover lambs to the temple for inspection by the priests. It was a day when many Jewish pilgrims would just be arriving into Jerusalem in preparation for Passover, which began four days later. There was a lot of excitement in the air, as people renewed friendships and welcomed one another to the feast. Well, today I'd like to take a look at some lessons from Palm Sunday and from the Feast of Passover. We can better see what Jesus has done for us as we examine the significance of the setting of Passion Week.

I. Lessons from Palm Sunday

A. Palm Sunday Reminds Us of the Passover Lamb – Four days before Passover, the people of Israel were required to present their lambs to the priest for inspection. In Jesus' day, the priesthood was very corrupt. When people brought their lambs for inspection, the priests would pretend to find something wrong with the lamb, which would require them to go and sell it for a fraction of its value, and come back and buy an approved one from the temple authorities at double the price. It was pure extortion, and Jesus was not happy about it. That is why we read about Him turning over the tables of the moneychangers in the temple. They were the ones who were robbing the people in this highly dishonest way.

-Jesus presented Himself to the people and priests that day as the Passover Lamb – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He made the crooked religious leaders angry, but the common people honored Him as their King.

-The book of Exodus, the 2nd book in the OT, tells us about the first Passover, when God delivered His people. The 10th and final plague of judgment against Egypt was to be the death of the firstborn in every household. However, God told Israel (Ex.12) to kill a lamb with no defects or blemishes, and to dip hyssop in the blood, and brush some of the blood on the doorposts of their houses. When the destroyer moved throughout Egypt to

strike down every firstborn, He could not destroy anyone who had the lamb's blood on their door. Why? Because they were protected by God Himself.

-The parallel is hard to miss. Jesus became our Passover Lamb. He was killed, and His blood became our protection against the destroyer. But you've got to put it on! Do you have blood on your doorpost? The lamb's death gives us life – if we receive it by faith and repentance.

-The word Passover is not so much passing by as passing so as to shield over. This gives more meaning to what Jesus said when He wept over Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37-39: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

-Jesus was saying that Jerusalem needed a real Passover – a real shielding or protection from the destroyer, and that He was that Shield. However, they were not willing to come close enough to Him to be protected from destruction.

-How about you? Are you willing to get close enough to Jesus to let Him help you? Are you willing to let Him be your Passover – your protection from the destroyer? How often he has longed to gather you in close to Himself, but you would not let Him. Will you let Him draw you close today?

B. Palm Sunday Reminds Us Who Our Savior Is – As the crowd of Jewish pilgrims and residents of Jerusalem lined the streets to welcome people coming into Jerusalem for Passover, on this day of inspection, they did not know that they would be welcoming their Savior. John tells us that many of them had heard that Jesus was coming into town and they went out to welcome Him. See, the people of Israel lived with a high messianic expectation, believing that God would send a Messiah to deliver them. Jesus seemed to fit the profile of a Messiah to them. Passover was a celebration of God's miraculous deliverance from the oppression of Egypt some 1500 years earlier. God raised up Moses to deliver Israel. He was a kind of messiah (anointed one). Now, as the feast of Passover was nearing, many Jews began to think, "Maybe the Lord will send us another Messiah to deliver us from the Romans, just like He did at the first Passover." What better time for a Messiah to come and deliver them from the Romans? During the very feast which commemorated Israel's liberation under Moses! So, having this expectancy in their spirits, these devout Jews encountered Jesus, the One who had been healing sick people, raising dead people, casting out demons, and teaching and preaching about the kingdom of God. They saw this same Jesus come riding into Jerusalem on a young donkey. Most Jews knew the OT inside out. When they saw Jesus on the colt, immediately, their minds went to Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

-These people were welcoming their King, the One who had salvation for them. Little did they know the price He would pay for their salvation. As they cried out, "Hosanna," which means, "Lord, save us now," they did not know that He would give up His own life so they could be saved from the bondage of sin. In Jesus' day, Hosanna had become an expression of praise more than a cry for help. However, help was on the way, and it would come by the death of the very King they were hoping would lead them to victory against the Romans.

-TS: We are going to have communion in just a few minutes, but I want to invest some of our time learning more about the Passover Meal, from which we get our observance of

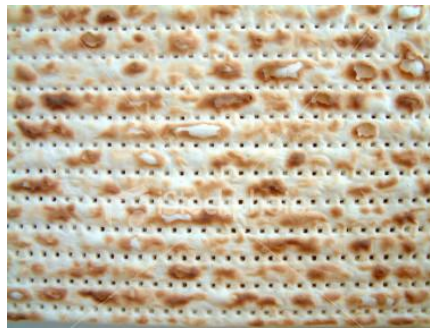
communion.

II. Lessons from Passover (The Seder Meal)

A. Unleavened Bread (Matzah) – Today, Matzah is striped and pierced for fast baking to make sure that the bread does not become leavened. In preparation for Passover, Jews would make sure they had cleaned out every last crumb of leavened bread (yeast bread) in obedience to what God said in Exodus 12:15. The Bible often compares leavened bread to sin, and unleavened bread to purity and righteousness.

-Though not intended by most Jewish manufacturers, the stripes and holes in the matzah serve as a reminder to us of Christ's suffering. Jesus received stripes when He was brutally beaten before He went to the cross. He was pierced with nails in His hands and feet, thorns in his head, and a spear in His side.

-There is plenty of matzah eaten during the meal, but a stack of 3 pieces have special meaning: 1) The top piece represents God the Creator in Heaven, 2) The bottom piece represents mankind on earth, and 3) The middle piece represents the mediating priest, between God and man. When the matzah is blessed, this middle piece is taken from the stack, blessed, broken, wrapped in a white cloth, and hidden away until after the meal. It is called the Afikomen, which means dessert. The children will search for it after the meal, and given a small reward for finding it. Then it is blessed and eaten with the 3rd cup of wine, the Cup of Redemption. The Afikomen was the piece that Jesus compared to His body which would be pierced and beaten for mankind. He is our High Priest who mediates between God and man.



B. The Cup of Redemption – There are four cups of diluted sweet wine that are drunk during the course of the Passover meal, as the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt unfolds. The 1st cup is called the Cup of Sanctification, and is drunk at the beginning of the meal. The 2nd cup is the Cup of Judgment, which is drunk during the reciting of the 10 plagues: Blood, Frogs, Lice, Flies, Cattle Disease, Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness, and Death of the Firstborn. As each plague is mentioned, the people dip in their finger and take out a drop of wine, because a full cup represents fullness of joy, and they were not joyful over the awful plagues that came against the Egyptians. The 3rd cup is the Cup of Redemption, which is drunk after the meal. The 4th cup is the Cup of Praise, drunk at the end of the whole occasion, after singing the Hallel from Psalms 115-118. It is a time of celebration over God's deliverance from bondage and sin.

-Now these 4 cups are based on the 4 "I wills" of Exodus 6:6-7. "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians (Salvation). I will deliver you from their bondage (Judgment), and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm (Redemption) and with mighty acts of judgment. 7 I will take you as my own people (Praise), and I will be your God.'"

-The 3rd cup, the Cup of Redemption, is the one Jesus compared to His own blood in the gospels. Jesus was saying, "I will redeem you with outstretched arms," just as in Exodus 6. I will buy you out of the slavery and bondage you are in. You will belong to me, and I will be your God!

Conclusion: As we close today, we can learn more about Jesus and all He has done for us by looking at Palm Sunday and Passover. We are reminded that Jesus is our Passover Lamb who has come to save people from their sins. The matzah bread and the cup of juice also remind us that Jesus is the way to God. Because His body was broken, beaten, and pierced, and his blood was poured out, we can know God. Today, if you are not trusting in Jesus as your Savior and leader, will you think about His outstretched arms and realize that they are open for you? He showed how much He loved you when He hung there in excruciating pain and agony with His arms open wide. Will you come to Him today? If you are willing to ask Him to forgive you for all the wrong things you've ever said or done, will you slip up your hand? Make things right with God today. Jesus paid the price. Will you finalize the purchase? He will help you no matter what your situation is.

-As we celebrate communion today, let's remember that we are forgiven because Jesus was forsaken. We are accepted because He was condemned. We now have eternal life and a reason to live because Jesus became our Passover Lamb and rose from the dead on the 3rd day.