

The Gospel in the Passover (Exodus 12: 1-51)

I The Hebrews chose their Passover Lambs on the 10th day of the first month of the year. (These were their instructions from Moses. Their month began on the night of the New Moon, that is, the one night of the month when the moon is invisible. So, sometime during the first 9 days after that New Moon, God spoke to Moses and gave him the message we read in verses 1-28. The 10th Day seems to be important. The number 10 is significant in Biblical literature as the number of completeness. There were 10 Plagues, so it is only fitting that the last warning should come on the 10th Day of the month. Some Bible scholars estimate that this was also the 10th month since the Plagues began.)

A The next day (that is, the morning after the 10th night after the New Moon), Moses proclaimed the Plague of Darkness to Pharaoh. (While Moses was meeting with Pharaoh the Children of Israel chose their Passover Lambs. They might not have understood his significance at that time, but when the Plague of Darkness began, and they noticed that they still had light in their homes, and then when the Angel of Death passed through the Land of Egypt without taking any of their children or animals, they would have understood it a lot better.)

B Three days later, the Death Angel took all the firstborn of Egypt. (A very careful reading of Chapter 12 might confuse us about exactly what happened, or when. Traditionally (and because of seeing Charlton Heston's movie too many times) believers have thought that the Plague of Darkness began and ended, and then the Angel of Death visited the homes of the Egyptians, and that the Hebrews killed and ate their Passover lambs while they were waiting for Moses to come back from Pharaoh's palace. Things may well have been that way, but it is more likely that the 3 events overlapped. That is to say, Moses gave the Children of Israel instructions about preparing for the Passover and the Exodus, then he went

to the Palace to warn Pharaoh and initiate the Plague of Darkness (in Chapter 10). That plague probably began at dusk on the day on the 10th day, or possibly the night before the 11th day, and Moses might well have been waiting in the Palace until he could deliver the last message (11:4-8). In any case there was darkness for three days, which would have been the 11th, 12th, and 13th of the month. Our best guess is that the Israelites killed their Passover lambs and put its blood on their doorposts the night of the 10th, as the Bible indicates, and then the sun just did not come up for the next three mornings. The Death Angel could have begun visiting the Egyptians at any time after that night, and the Children of Israel would have been safe. Pharaoh's officials probably brought the summons to Moses on the Fourth Night, which would be the night before the 14th (when there should have been a full moon). If the full moon was also invisible (due to the Plague of Darkness), there would have been considerable urgency in verse 33.

Now let us turn to how this story contains the Gospel message.)

II John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God. (John the Baptist's message, according to Matthew 3:2, was *Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near*. That message itself is significant for several reasons, one of which we will return to momentarily. He preached thus in order to *prepare the way for the Lord and make straight paths for Him* (Isaiah 40:3). So John associated the coming of the Messiah with the advent of the Kingdom of Heaven, and he told people to repent in preparation for entering that Kingdom. How is it that we have got so far from associating the Kingdom of Heaven with Jesus? Sharing every rumor you hear with everyone you meet is gossip, not evangelism. Evangelism is about converting unbelievers to faith in Jesus Christ, not about gossip and rumors; and the gossips and rumor mongers are hypocrites, not evangelists. Church work should be about evangelizing unbelievers with the Gospel of Salvation by Grace

through faith in Jesus, not about gathering enough people so that the church offerings are sufficient to fund some pastor's retirement pension. Such is the stuff of cults; but church work should be about Jesus.)

A Exodus 12:46 should be understood in terms of John 19:36. (The Lamb of God would take away the sin of the world, according to John the Baptist when he introduced Jesus. Jesus did that by coming to earth to reconcile God and men, by our faith in the Grace of God; by dying to redeem humanity from sin; by rising from the dead in justification of our faith; and by sending His Holy Spirit to give life to the church. No pastor, teacher, evangelist, elder, or deacon did any of that. Church has to be about Jesus. He was the perfect Sacrifice for sin because He was Son of God and Son of Man. The point about the unbroken bones is a part of that perfection. The Passover Lamb was an Old Testament symbol for Jesus.)

B The Blood of the Passover Lamb protected the homes of the Children of Israel from the Angel of Death. (Now we should remember that first, in order for someone to benefit from the protection, the blood had to be on the doorposts of the house he was in. If someone ignored the Word of God (delivered by the voice of Moses and Aaron), and neglected to use the blood of the lamb properly and promptly, there would have been no protection for them. Contemporary church members would do well to meditate on the importance of the Word of God in their lives, too. Then secondly, the blood of the lamb protected everyone who was in that house. This was because God (we might say, Jesus) was guarding the houses with the blood on the doorposts, and would *not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down*. If the destroyer could not enter a house, he could not have struck anyone in that house down, even if it might have been an Egyptian who sought refuge among the Hebrews. There is nothing in the Bible to say that it happened that way, except for a few places like Psalm 103:13, *Like*

as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. Now to connect our Old Testament symbol with our New Testament faith, let us consider the roaring lion of 1 Peter 5:8 (*your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*), and Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the Door Keeper of the Sheepfold in John 10:1-18 (specifically, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.*) We might wonder about the mixture of metaphors here: how is it that *the Lamb of God* can become *the Good Shepherd*? It was by laying down His life for the sheep. That is, just as the blood of the Passover Lamb protected the Children of Israel from the Angel of Death, so the Blood of the Lamb of God protects the Children of God (*born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God—John 1:13*)—the Blood of the Lamb of God protects the Children of God, in His sheepfold. In the Old Testament the blood of the lamb was on the doorposts; in the New Testament, the Lamb of God *is the Door.*)

C Verses 43-49 symbolize restrictions on the benefits of Salvation. (Literally, these verses tell us who should not eat the Passover meal; and to be technically correct, we could also use these verses to make the case that the Children of Israel were not allowed to entertain Egyptian guests on that occasion. But our point is that the Passover is a symbolic representation of the message of Salvation, and so we should consider who may, and who may not, benefit from the Grace of God. Jesus died to redeem all humanity from all sin of all time; that is, from the curse of the Original Sin. The word in that sentence which shows how the Death of Christ benefits all humanity is *redeem*. Redeem means, to buy something back, like merchandise at a pawn shop. Our first ancestors pawned the souls of all their

descendants in order to enjoy their rebelliousness against the Command of God, and the devil held the pawn ticket. In other words, the condition of all humanity was sin, and the result of the condition was death, and the devil kept it that way until Jesus died. Jesus, the sinless Son of God and Son of Man, sacrificed Himself to pay off the pawn ticket. That plan would only work if Jesus was sinless in fact; because otherwise His death would have paid for only His own sin. And it only worked if Jesus was really God, because as God He was infinite, and so His death could extend infinitely into the past and into the future, so that anyone who ever had lived or ever would live could offer the sacrificial Lamb of God in atonement for sin by faith. These two points show how absolutely essential it is for us to understand our faith—that is, what exactly do we believe about Jesus, and why? But let us return to our discussion of the restrictions.

God restricted participation in the Passover, because the Children of Israel were special, His holy people, and no one should enjoy the benefits of that special relationship with God by only pretending to be a Hebrew: thus, we see the requirements of being circumcised and ceremonially clean. Does God restrict the benefits of Redemption as well? He does, even if the contemporary institutional church has become so humanistic and liberal that it ignores the Word of God as revealed in scripture, and promises His Grace to all comers, no matter what.

It seems reasonable that if one were to buy the pawn ticket for everything in a pawn shop, that he would find some things inside that he was willing to clean up and repair and keep and use, and some things that were so badly broken or damaged that, no matter how much he loved his new purchases, they were good for nothing but the landfill. We see a more scriptural description of this in the parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matthew 13:24-30). The owner of the field recognized the damage done by his enemy, but he allowed weeds and wheat to

grow together in order to prevent inadvertent damage to the wheat. He would wait until harvest time, and burn up the weeds, and then gather the wheat into the barn. The Apostle Paul described this problem to Timothy, in 3:2-7. Do verses 2, 5, or 6 describe people who will be going to Heaven when they die?)

For this reason we say that there are restrictions on the benefits of the Grace of God, too. The restriction is that God forgives sin when people repent and forsake sin, not when they join a church, get anointed with holy water, or eat rice cakes and drink communion wine. And for this reason we are warned (I Corinthians 11) to evaluate our spiritual condition before we eat the Lord's Supper, because it is the Body and Blood of Jesus. Let us not eat and drink damnation to ourselves, regardless of what we have heard about the doctrine of eternal security.)

III The Passover was about eating Lamb meat and leaving Egypt. (For 430 years the Children of Israel served Egyptians as slaves, and at least in that last century things had gotten very bad for them. Now it was time for their liberation. For the average Hebrew slave, that was all Moses' announcement of God's instructions for the menu and the departure meant. They were unlikely to have associated anything in their experience with Messianic Prophecy, unless they happened to be one of the elders or their closest confidants. For them it was all about leaving Egypt, expeditiously and permanently.)

A Jesus said that the Bread and Wine were His Body and Blood. (For the Hebrews, Passover and the Exodus were about getting out of Egypt and going to the Promised Land in Canaan. For the Christian, they are symbols for deliverance from sin, and the presence of Jesus in our lives. For seven days, approximately the time it took them to get to the Red Sea from the Land of Goshen, they ate only unleavened bread. That means their bread had no yeast because there was no time for dough to rise. (There is no reason to think that they had to bake the bread

on the march, either, as they had three days during the plague of darkness to pack their food and belongings.) Jews still celebrate a seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread in commemoration of this time, in conjunction with the Passover. Jesus gave us a different symbol in the unleavened bread. During the Last Supper with His Disciples, He took a loaf of the unleavened bread and broke it, and said that it was His Body, which was broken for us. The wine was the New Testament in His Blood. The Old Testament, as we will see a little further in Exodus (and in the Book of Hebrews) was in the blood of sheep and goats. The Old Testament was temporary, in that Jesus would replace it with Himself; and it was inferior, in that the sacrifice of an animal could only *represent* the death of a soul, not replace it. Jesus replaced the symbols for atonement with the real thing. Remember, please: if we forget that church is about Jesus, then we ought not to call it church at all.)

B Hebrews 8 and 9 tell us what happened in Heaven when Jesus died. (Right up until the afternoon of the Death of Christ, the souls of all who had ever died were excluded from Heaven, because of sin. (That doesn't mean that they were in hell, that is another story altogether.) They were excluded from Heaven just as all humanity was excluded from communion with the Spirit of God. There was a big thick curtain in the Temple, hanging between the Holy of Holies, where God met the high priest—but only once each year—and the rest of the Temple, to symbolize that exclusion. When Jesus died, several things happened, and we may even say simultaneously. The soul of Jesus had no sin, and so Death was unjust. Therefore He did not belong in the Prison we call Death, where Satan was keeping all the other souls of everyone else who had ever died. Yet, there He was. Brighter than Day and full of a Life of Righteousness, the soul of Jesus could not remain in that Prison. So Jesus broke the bonds of death (in the words of Psalm 68:18, *He ascended up on high and led captivity captive and gave gifts to men*), and made it

possible for those people who were in that prison to become children of God in the same way we do: salvation by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, for anyone who would receive Jesus as their Christ and Lord. Also, there was an earthquake, and that big curtain, which symbolized the exclusion of men from the presence of God, was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth had to quake when Satan's Prison was broken, and God Himself tore the veil. Now all men could come into His Presence, because Jesus had atoned for the sins that kept them bound in the devil's Prison.

Jesus was both the Lamb of God that was slain to atone for all sins, and He was our High Priest who entered the Presence of God to use His own Blood for that atonement. God arranged that atonement; so He accepted it; and thereafter reconciliation between God and men was possible. Now we may be inclined to ask, if all this resulted from the death of Jesus, then what was the point of the Resurrection?

First let us recall that when we say that Jesus is our Savior, we are affirming belief in our reconciliation with God by virtue of the vicarious atonement in the Blood of Jesus. So how can we know that God accepted the Sacrifice, or that the Atonement resulted in our reconciliation? We have only our faith in the veracity of scripture to support the claim; and we have only our faith in the spiritual truths represented by scripture to tell us that the words of Paul and Peter represent our position with God accurately.

So then (and this is second is only because of our linear thinking, not because of chronology with God), God provided us with one very important historical event, by which we can know that all the foregoing theology *is* fact in the mind of God: it was the Resurrection of Jesus. Thus we have two very good reasons for our hope in Salvation by Grace through faith in Jesus: one is the truth

of what theologians call *soteriology*; and the other is the justification of our faith when we say we believe these things. Let us note here that these things would be true whether Peter and Paul wrote them in their epistles or not; and that these things remain true whether men believe them or not. Our faith in these things is justified by the Resurrection of Jesus. Therefore it is imperative that we believe in a literal, physical Resurrection, because the historicity of that one special event is the veritable foundation of our Christian Faith.)

C The Hebrews ate unleavened bread and drank wine for seven days, after the Passover Night. (It was a practical thing, for them; they were slaves on the run, after all, and they didn't have time for picnics in the park. God wanted them to remember that event, too, so He commanded a perpetual commemoration of both the Passover and the seven days of unleavened bread. This symbol is important for believers too, as we have shown, and so we use unleavened bread and wine to commemorate the Lord's Supper. Let us note that the Lord's Supper was itself the commemoration of the Passover, and that the Lamb of God was indeed sacrificed for all sins of all men of all times, the very next day. That Day (the morning after the night of the first full moon after the spring equinox) came to be a special holy day for the Jews, called the Day of Atonement. That, is significant for us too. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrificial lamb on his hands, to atone for the sins of Israel for the year. He was the only one whom God allowed to enter inside that big curtain, and he could only go in one time each year. This was another Old Testament symbol for the Life and Work of Jesus. When Jesus came, He did away with all the symbols and replaced them with the real, once for all, atoning sacrifice in His own blood. This is what believers mean when we say we *are dead and our life is hid with Christ in God* (Colossians 3:3).)

IV We must see Jesus symbolized in the Passover Lamb. (If we fail to understand the symbol then we risk failing to discern the Body and Blood of our Lord in the Communion elements as well. The Old Testament would become little more than an exercise in reading comprehension, and at best, a somewhat opaque historical account of Old Testament religious traditions. But if we can see the symbols and understand their significance, then the Christian Faith will make sense as Faith, and can stand up in our hearts independently of rational supports.)

A We must see our own departure from worldliness symbolized by the Exodus. (For the Hebrews, it was all about leaving Egypt and going to their Promised Land in Canaan. They could not both go to Canaan and remain in Egypt; that would have been geographically impossible. Similarly, believers must leave this world to go to our Promised Land in Heaven. We cannot both remain in this physical world and enter the Kingdom of God; that is spiritually impossible. Now at first glance, we might say that these are self-evident truth; but then we see very quickly that there are people all around us who claim to be believers, who think that they can continue to enjoy a worldly lifestyle during their lifetimes and then go to Heaven when they are finished; they tried to be good and go to church, and all that. But reformation is not regeneration, and as Jesus told Nicodemus, we *must be born again* (John 3:3). None of this means that Christians are perfectly free from sin and temptations immediately; it does mean that in the eyes of God, the Holy Spirit is changing His children until we are perfectly conformed to the image of Christ. We should look for evidence of the changes, not for perfection.)

B We must see our spiritual condition symbolized in the Passover restrictions. (There were some strict rules about who could share the Passover dinner, and about how someone who was not a Hebrew might also join its commemoration. We should see that the benefits of the Grace of God are also restricted, to His

Children only. We would do well to evaluate our spiritual conditions before we share the Lord's Supper; and we would do well to examine the lifestyles of those who claim to be Christians. We must not go so far as to equate Salvation with public professions and appearances, for to do so risks things like making defining salvation in terms of works, or formulas, or dress codes, or hairstyles. All of these things are important and for their own reasons, but they are not the substance of Salvation and we must not treat them as such. Yet it is very important for believers to maintain a lifestyle that is consistent with our testimony. Failure to do so risks compromising the Glory of God with humanism, and creating a reproach in the Family of God, and making a mockery of the Faith.)

C We must feed our spiritual lives on the Bread of Life and Living Water of Jesus Christ, as we take our journey to our Promised Land. (We usually avoid discussing the balance of our public testimony and our private lifestyle. After all, how can one who is only human draw a line between what is acceptable or not in the sight of God with respect to what is inside the soul of another person? The solution to this particular exasperation seems to be rooted in responsibility. If we accept the authority of the scriptures, then let us allow one another to evaluate his own spiritual condition by that holy standard, and trust the Spirit of God to teach all of us the same lessons. If someone seems not to be learning the same lessons, or not learning as quickly as we, then it is God's business and not ours to decide when the boundary between patience and indulgence has been crossed. We have the privilege of edifying, that is, strengthening, one another in faith in Jesus; it is God's business to decide if the effort is a waste of time. So let us use the Word of God as He intended: to be the Bread of Life and the Living Water by which we nourish our souls, and those of our friends and neighbors.)

V It is easier for New Testament Christians than for Jews to understand the

symbolism in the Passover story. (The most obvious reason for this is that God blinded their minds intentionally, until the fullness of the Gentiles is brought into the Kingdom of God too (Romans 11:25). Now we might be tempted to ask God whether He is being fair to the Jews, but that is because we think it is unfair to leave innocent and otherwise well-meaning people out of the Kingdom, or, unevangelized. If you really feel that way then by all means, go out and evangelize some Jews; otherwise, we ought to be, as Jesus described us in Matthew 6, the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Then let us be salty and our testimony be obvious, and we shall be doing the Will of God.)

A Jews continue to think that they will administer a political and geographical Kingdom of God on earth. (This is their misunderstanding of the Kingdom of God. This is the point to which we had to return, from a few moments ago. John the Baptist associated the Kingdom of God with the advent of the Messiah. That is, he preached that the Messiah was bringing the Kingdom of God. That meant something different to the Jews than it did to God. Jesus is King in the Kingdom of God, the Law is Love and the culture is Christ (*the lion shall lay down with the lamb, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares*) according to Kingdom prophecies in the Old Testament. Jews, however, interpret various Old Testament prophecies concerning a restoration of Zion in their own favor. In our times, their opinions have come to be called Zionism; and there is nothing scriptural about Zionism. Biblical prophecy does lead us to think that the current State of Israel is a fulfillment of certain eschatological prophecies; but we should see the restoration of Israel as a catalyst for worse things to come, rather than as the predecessor of the Millennial Kingdom of God.)

B Christians believe Messianic prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus. (Whereas the Jews believe that the Messiah will come to restore the Kingdom of God to

Israel, as the Disciples put it in Acts 1:6, Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah and that He initiated the Kingdom of God among believers by His message, which we call *the Gospel*. The Kingdom of God is in the hearts of believers, who share it in a bond of fellowship that was forged by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is available to us because Jesus made Him available, in fact, it is that Holy Spirit that gives us our new life in Jesus, and it is the Holy Spirit that gives the life and personality of Jesus to the church. Faith would be little more than a formula for gnosticism if Jesus were only Mary and Joseph's first *woops!* or if He had died only and not risen from the dead. But believers see Jesus as the Lamb of God, Whose Blood was the Sacrifice of our Atonement, Whose Death we commemorate with the unleavened bread and wine, and Whose Resurrection justifies our faith in Salvation by the Grace of God. This is the way the Gospel is symbolized in the Passover.)