

The Feast of the Passover

Scripture readings: Exodus 12:1-13; Colossians 2: 9 - 17.

A sermon outline suitable for Communion Sunday

Introduction

We all know about rehearsals. We, for example, have rehearsals for weddings. The bride and groom practice walking down the aisle, they practice their vows, they practice their kiss and they practice walking out without stumbling down the steps.

I rehearse every sermon before the congregation listens to them. I did a rehearsal for my first celebration of the Lord's Supper; I went through the entire service to know what and how I had to do it. I even did a rehearsal for my first baptism. I was required to baptise a cushion at a probationer ministers' conference.

We all know that rehearsals are not the real thing. Brides and grooms don't get married at rehearsals and cushions are not really baptized.

When considering the feasts of Israel, it is important to remember what God told Moses to say to the people about their feasts:

(Lev 23:2) "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to be proclaim as sacred assemblies.'

The phrase for "sacred assembly" are in a few English Bibles translated as convocations, formal meetings that may take binding decisions for the future of a body - sometimes a denomination, and sometimes a university. It has a meaning that expects a true outcome in the future, based on what happens at the convocation. The Hebrew word means something that relates to our word: "rehearsal".

The Old Testament feasts of the Lord were convocations that served as rehearsals. They had a lot of meaning for what was still to come, but they were not the real thing. As Paul explained to the Colossians, they *were only shadows, with the reality only being found in Christ (Col 2:17)*. All of the feasts of Israel pointed towards Jesus who was still to come. They not only pointed towards him, but were also fulfilled in him. And, this is especially true of the Feast of the Passover.

1. The first Passover.

Israel lived in Egypt for 430 years and many of those years they were in bondage. God sent Moses to lead them out to freedom. Already before Moses arrived in Egypt, God told him what was going to happen. God told Moses to tell Pharaoh,

(Ex 4:22-23) "Israel is my firstborn son ... Let my son go, so he may worship me ... but you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son."

We know that many judgements came upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The ten plagues came upon him, because he did not let God's people go: the water of the Nile changed to blood, the frogs, the gnats, the flies, the plague on the livestock, the boils, the hail, the locusts, and the darkness. However, the death of the firstborn sons was the worst of the judgments. Terrible destruction was visited by the Lord upon the land of Egypt before Pharaoh would finally let God's firstborn son, Israel, go to serve him as a free people.

The firstborn of every family, and even the firstborn of the cattle, were to be struck down by the Lord's angel of death. But there was an exception - the exception was for those people who by faith did what God told them to do.

Those, whose firstborn did not die, were to take a male lamb - an unblemished lamb, a lamb without defect, slaughter it and collect its blood. In those days there was a trench with a collection pot outside the door of your house. It was intended to collect water when it rained. When the Israelites slaughtered the lamb, they were to do it at the door of the house that the blood could run into the trench and into the collection pot. Then they were to take a bunch of hyssop, a plant, dip it into the collection pot and smear the blood above the door posts and the sides of the door. When the angel of the Lord saw the blood, he would pass over that house and household and the firstborn would not die. This is why they called the feast that remembered this day, the feast of the Passover.

It was an act of faith through which faithful Israelites said that night: We believe what God says. We believe that God will spare those who trust his word and therefore trust the effect of the blood of the lamb on their door posts.

As part of the Passover, the Israelites were to eat the lamb in family units. With it they ate bitter herbs, representing the bitterness of their bondage and slavery, and unleavened bread, representing that they were leaving the old life of slavery behind in Egypt.

And they were not seated, but standing while eating. They ate it dressed and ready to go, donkeys and carts already loaded, showing us the haste with which they left Egypt. There was no time to sit down for a family meal. They would waste no time. They would flee from bondage as fast and as far as they could, into the freedom God intended for them.

2. The Passover that Jesus celebrated.

In most of the phases during the Old Testament history, the Israelites observed the Passover in some or other format. When Jesus was on earth, the Passover was still celebrated, although it developed more customs as the years went by.

They still sacrificed a lamb. The priests would gather at the Temple and the high priest would slaughter a lamb on behalf of the nation. The Jews who could make it to Jerusalem, also slaughtered a lamb for each celebrating group that came to the holy city to remember their deliverance from Egypt. They did not necessarily do it in family gatherings in the strictest sense of the word, but they only celebrated in groupings of more than 10 but less than 20 people. The reason was that they had to eat the entire lamb. Nothing should be left over. Jesus and his disciples made up such a group of believers and therefore qualified to have a lamb for their Passover feast and his last supper.

They still ate the lamb with a gravy of bitter herbs and they still had unleavened bread. Jesus dipped some of the bread into the bitter gravy and give it to his disciples, including Judas, to eat, because the Bread of Life would be given to them through bitter suffering.

And then we should know that they drank four cups of wine during the Passover meal. The first was called the "cup of blessing," the cup with which Jesus instituted his holy Supper, the second was the "cup of wrath," the third the "cup of redemption," and the fourth the "cup of the kingdom". Jesus said he would not drink the Cup of the Kingdom again, until his Kingdom would come in power. (Lk 22:18).

3. The Passover feast fulfilled in Jesus

What does all of this teach us about Jesus and about us?

Let's think about what the book of Exodus teaches about the Passover, and we will find that every time it was ever celebrated, it was a rehearsal,. It was a rehearsal of our deliverance from the bondage of sin by Jesus, our Saviour. The law regarding the celebration of the Passover in the Old Testament prophesied about the atoning work of our Lord and were fulfilled in and through him.

First of all we notice in verse 3 that the animal chosen for the Passover, was selected on the tenth day of the month and was immediately introduced to the people of Israel. On the tenth day of the month the lamb was brought out.

Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph on Palm Sunday, on the tenth day of the month, on the day that the priest presented the Passover lamb to the people. Jesus was introduced to the people as the Messiah, entering as a humble servant on a donkey, as the prophet said it would be. He then spent that week being with them in the Temple courts to be tested and challenged, and they could discern his claim that he was the unblemished Lamb of God.

John the Baptist said: "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29). Jesus is the true Passover lamb. All other Passover feasts were only rehearsals of what was to come.

Secondly, we read in verse 5 that the lamb must be a "year-old male without defect."

The lamb was presented to the people that they could be certain that it was perfect and without flaw, according to the law of God.

Jesus was challenged and tested. By the elders, the chief priests, Pilate, Herod, Annas and Caiaphas. And they found nothing wrong with him. They had to use bribed witnesses to find him guilty. They had to blackmail Pilate to judge him. Because he truly was the Lamb without blemish.

Jesus is the true Passover lamb. His sacrifice brought atonement and true freedom to his people. All the Passover lambs before him were only rehearsals of what was to come.

And then, thirdly, on the day of preparation for the Passover, the fourteenth day of the month, the high priest took the lamb that had been approved by the people and tied him to the altar at 9 o'clock in the morning. From 9 o'clock in the morning until 3pm the lamb was waiting to be finally slaughtered. And on Calvary, at 9 in the morning, at the very time the priest was tying the Passover lamb to the altar, Jesus was led out to be crucified, to be tied to the cross. Jesus is the true Passover lamb. All other Passover lambs before him were mere rehearsals of what was to come.

Finally, the actual killing of the lamb was to be done by the high priest while he recited a carefully worded liturgy and as he drew the knife across the throat of the lamb, he said: "It is finished."
At 3 o'clock on the day of Christ's crucifixion, Jesus was breathing his last and said "It is finished."

Jesus certainly is the true Passover lamb. All the other Passover lambs were only rehearsals of what was to come through his atoning death.

4. The true Passover: what does it mean today?

To be saved and delivered from Gods judgement is a high-priced, generous task. We were delivered by the true Passover Lamb, the eternal son of God. He gave his precious blood, that we could be saved.

The Passover feast reminded Israel, and today reminds me and you, that we have been saved. We have been delivered from the bondage of sin and the terrible judgement of God. Jesus drank the bitter cup of the wrath of God, he gave his blood, and thus became the Lamb of God who saved us from the eternal death of Gods punishment of sin.

Israel was delivered from its bondage to Pharaoh and Egypt. We who are Gods people in Jesus Christ, have been set free from sin.

Egypt was not covered with blood and they lost their firstborn sons. But Israel was and the angel of death did not strike at any home covered with the blood of the lamb. The blood of the Lamb, the Lamb of God, covers us. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). Praise the Lord, because we may sing, believing every word of the song: *There is power, power, wonder-working power, in the precious blood of the Lamb!*

Closing:

The true Passover Lamb has been slain. He was tested and found to be without defect. He was tied to the cross-altar and died when he finished all of his atonement work. It was no rehearsal. It was real deliverance. It brought us proper redemption. We are really saved. Jesus is the true Saviour of his people. This is why Jesus replaced the Passover feast, a rehearsal of the deliverance that was to come, with his Supper, with the sacrament of Holy Communion - a feast of remembrance of what had occurred on Calvary when we were truly, in reality, once and for all, redeemed by the Lamb of God.

Come, let's remember all he did for us. Let's eat and drink with the living King of all, and do this in remembrance of his sacrifice for us. Because the Old Testament feasts were *only a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.* (Col 2:17) The reality of salvation is celebrated through this true, authentic fellowship with the living Lord at his Table.

And because we experience the reality of fellowship with Jesus here, it also becomes a shadow, a rehearsal of the wedding feast of the Lamb, so soon to come.

This is the Word of God.

Amen.