

REMEMBERING JESUS' SUFFERING

How many things did you forget to do this past week? Our lives seem to have so many facets that most of us find it difficult to keep track of all that we need to remember. Some things in life are so important that we cannot afford to forget them or their significance. An example is our beginning as a nation and the start of a totally new concept in government. We still make a big deal over the events that occurred on July 4, 1776. This time of celebration should cause us to remember the principles upon which this nation was founded and the heritage we have.

The Jews had events they remembered in their culture. The most significant one was their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. They celebrated this event each year so they would remember and pass on to their children the significance of what happened. The Passover event also had spiritual significance in that it was a foreshadowing of our salvation experience. Just as the Israelites were slaves of the Egyptians, each person is in bondage to sin and the way of the world. It was only through the intervention of God that the Hebrews were saved from their physical situation and it is only through the intervention of God through Jesus that we can be saved from our slavery to sin, self, and the devil.

The relationship between the Passover and the work that Jesus accomplished started coming into focus as the Jewish leaders begin to become serious about doing "something" about Jesus.

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present. Luke 22:1-6

The Passover meal (a lamb without

blemish) was to be eaten at the beginning of the week-long observance in which unleavened bread was eaten. The lamb was killed and the blood put on the door post of the house so that the Death Angel whom God sent to Egypt would "pass over" the homes of the children of Israel. We can immediately see the parallel with Jesus being the Lamb of God and the significance of the blood of Jesus being a covering for our sins.

The Jewish leaders were convinced Jesus had to be killed and yet they did not know how they could accomplish it. First of all, they did not have the authority to do it. They would need to get the Romans involved. Second, they needed a way to "capture" Jesus when there were not many people around Him. They could not just arrest Him in the Temple. The people would attack them since Jesus was thought to be a great teacher and a prophet. Judas provided the means for the Jews to arrest Jesus. We know the story of how Judas agreed to lead them to Jesus when Jesus was away from the crowd.

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there." They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. Luke 22:7-13

The plans for the meals were secret. No one was to know the details except Peter and John. Even they would not know the specifics of the location until they arrived at the place. The secrecy was needed because Jesus did not want that time to be interrupted by the temple guards and the soldiers coming to arrest Him. Judas was looking for an

opportunity to betray Jesus and the upper room would have a great place for that to happen.

Had Jesus prearrange the room with the owner? We are not told the details of how all that was arranged but someone other than the disciples had to be involved.

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Luke 22:14-18

As the time for the culmination of the earthly ministry of Jesus drew closer, the events started taking on obvious significance. The Passover meal Jesus and His disciples would eat together would be the last one in the old order of things. It would be transitional and take on the spiritual significance for which it was intended.

What Luke does not tell us is that the group of disciples really had not idea of how significant this event really was. They did not know that the events of that night and how they behaved would be told and re-told thousands of times. Had they realized this, they might have not been so caught up in their own little world of greed and pride wondering who would be the "greatest" in the kingdom.

During the course of the meal, Jesus told them how He had looked forward to this particular Passover observance. I believe that He had looked forward to this time since the very first time the Passover meal was eaten by the children of Israel when they were in Egypt. The events of this Passover observance would be the culmination of all those past observances that pointed to the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

Though Jesus had made specific reference to His suffering and death, the disciples did not fully comprehend the magnitude of what was to happen in the next 24 hours. None of them (especially Judas)

would have dreamed that Jesus would be beaten nearly to the point of death, a crown of thorns pressed on His head, would have ridicule heaped upon Him by the leaders of the Jews, would be spat upon, and would undergo the agony of the crucifixion and the feeling of being abandoned.

Jesus made an interesting comment regarding the next time He was going to take part in a Passover-like meal. The meaning of "I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God" is not clear. Many think that this will be at the "marriage supper of the Lamb" after the church has been gathered into heaven.

The cup of wine was shared during the meal; however, this was not related to the reference to His shed blood. This wine was related to the Passover observance. After that observance had been completed, then Jesus established something new.

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Luke 22:19-20

The new observance started with bread. Throughout His ministry, He referred to Himself as the Bread of Life. He was born in a little town whose name literally means House of Bread. The symbolism of the bread being broken is significant. If you have a loaf of bread and it cannot be broken, then it is not of much use except to be attractive. Likewise, God wants us to experience broken-ness in that we stop relying on our own strength and realize that we are completely dependent on God.

Next, the cup was passed around. This time it had significance in that it was to represent the Blood of Jesus. It was that which would seal the New Covenant. A covenant or "will" does not go into force until the maker of the will dies. When Jesus died, the New Covenant became effective. We are also told that this blood shed for us is the price of our redemption.