

Christ, Our Passover Lamb
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Exodus 12:1-28

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He was waiting. He had been waiting his whole life. So, when he saw the man coming down the road to meet him, he stood there and stared at Him in exultation. The man who was the one looking was a bedraggled looking man in a tunic made from the rough side of a camel. He ate whatever came his way, which was locusts and wild honey. He saw the man coming toward him, and he shouted out, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Another man profoundly affected by Jesus on the road to Damascus would write that Christ is our Passover Lamb, and that He has been sacrificed. Our passage teaches us that Jesus is the passover Lamb, and that He has been sacrificed in our place, and that His blood comes in between the wrath of God and the sinner who trusts in Him.

We have been waiting for the last and final stroke of doom against Egypt. And now, we're going to have to wait a little longer. Moses keeps us in suspense here, for he wants us to remember with great vividness what God is doing here. The reason for that is that it was not only the Egyptians who deserved to die. *The Israelites also deserved to die.* Otherwise, why would a lamb have to be sacrificed? Why would blood have to be placed on the doorposts and lintels of the home? And, this is how we come to see the glory of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Israelites were not inherently better than the Egyptians. But God did tell them to believe in Him, and to confess their faith publicly by means of smearing blood on their doors. And this was to be remembered. And so should we remember what God has done in Jesus Christ.

The first thing we see here is obviously the Passover lamb. The lamb had to be the right size. So is Jesus Christ the perfect sacrifice for all the people of God. This lamb had to be perfect. No blemish was allowed. So also Jesus was perfectly sinless throughout His entire lifetime. The lamb was to be a year old, in the very prime of life. So also was Jesus in the prime of life, probably about 33 years old when He was crucified. The lamb was to be killed at twilight on the fourteenth day of the month. It is no accident that this is the same time of year and the same time of day in which Jesus died. The lamb was to be roasted over a fire. So also Jesus was to experience the fiery wrath of God Almighty. And the lamb was to be eaten. So also we are to eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood in the Lord's Supper, symbolically. The blood of the lamb was to be put on the doorposts, and some of it would naturally spill on the threshold. Verse 22 says that the hyssop branch was to be dipped *in the basin*. Another, better way of translating that word "basin" is "threshold." So blood would be up, down, right and left. Curiously cross-shaped, isn't it? The blood completely covered the people within by completely covering the door. But what did this blood do?

The blood was a propitiation of God's wrath. Propitiation is a long word. What does it mean? It means blood that comes in between God's wrath and the sinner. See, the blood on the doorposts meant that the destroying angel would harm no one in that house, as long as they stayed inside that house. The blood on the doorpost indicated that the life of the lamb had taken the place of the lives of the Israelites. The lamb was a substitute. But we cannot fully understand the term propitiation without understanding the nature of God's righteous wrath against sin. God is right to be angry against sin. God is right to punish sin. If God did not punish sin, He would not be God. But there are two ways for that sin to be punished. One is for a person to be punished in and of himself. This is what happened to the Egyptians. They were punished for their sins. However, there is a second way, which is for someone else to take the place of the guilty person. When that happens, the wrath that should have landed on the sinner is diverted to another person, and that person is Christ. Christ's blood is placed in between us and God. That turning aside of the wrath of God from us to Christ is what propitiation is. This word is used several times in the New Testament, so it is not a word invented by theologians. It is a biblical word, and therefore we must understand what it means, for this word propitiation describes something that is at the very heart of salvation. For Christ's blood to interpose itself between us and God is nothing less than salvation itself. You see, as Leviticus says, the life of any animal or person is in the blood. The life of the flesh is in the blood. And our lives are forfeit to God because of our sin. And so the only way that we can get out of paying that life is for another to pay that debt for us. That is precisely what Jesus has done. So, propitiation is blood that gets in between God's wrath and the poor sinner, and diverts that wrath, because the debt has been paid. Is that your story? Has Jesus' blood paid your debt and kept the destroying angel from taking your life? Jesus is our Passover Lamb.

The Passover meal was to be eaten in haste. Everything about the meal was hasty. Roasting the meat took a

lot less time than boiling the meat. Unleavened bread was eaten because there was no time to wait for bread to rise. They were to eat it with belt fastened and sandals on and staff in hand, plainly ready to go at a moment's notice. They were not to look back on Egypt with fondness. They were to set their minds on the things ahead. They were to make a clean break with everything about Egypt. As Ryken says, we must make a clean sweep. Just as the Israelites were to sweep all the yeast out of their house, so also must we sweep all the sin out of our lives. They were being transported out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. So it must be with us also. We must make a clean break with the reign of sin. Becoming a Christian means leaving behind our Egypt of sin, that realm of ultimate darkness. That is not who we are anymore. Now, Christians do still sin. There is, unfortunately, still that bit of yeasty sin still in our lives. However, sin no longer reigns over us as lord and master, for Christians have a new master, who is Jesus Christ. This is why it is so important for us to fight sin all our lives. Paul tells us, in the very same passage where he tells us that Christ is our Passover Lamb, he also tells us there to get rid of the leaven of sin, the yeast of sin. Yeast was a symbol of continuity with the past. You would take some of the dough from the day before and work it into the new loaf of bread. Unleavened bread, or flatbread, was therefore a symbol of discontinuity with what came in the past. You didn't take what you had from before and mix it with the new life. Instead, you make a clean break with the past. The Christian life is not a freedom to do what our sin nature wants to do. The Christian life is rather freedom *from* slavery to sin *so that* we can love and obey God, which is real freedom. A lot of people do not understand what true freedom is. They often think that freedom means the ability to do whatever they want. The Bible calls that slavery, since doing whatever you want is another way of saying that are doing all the sin that you want. The Bible's definition of freedom is very different. It is a break with the slavery to sin, and it is a new life of service to God. The fact is that we will always be slaves to someone or something, because we are worshipers. We are enslaved to what or who we worship. The question, then, is this: are we enslaved to sin, or are we enslaved to God? We are going to be one or the other. If we are enslaved to sin, we might have temporary joy in falling to temptation, but the conscience bites back, and the next life is one of utter misery. Being enslaved to God might mean a more difficult life here and now (although God gives us joy in the midst of trials!), but it will mean pure bliss for all eternity. Those are your only two choices.

A lot of these threads can be tied together by remembering what baptism means. Remember that baptism is a physical sign of water that points to the blood of Christ. We sprinkle, or pour, the water on the one receiving the sign. The Passover here points forward to the blood of Christ, whereas baptism looks back to the blood of Christ. And baptism is a sign of faith, just as putting the blood on the doorposts is a sign of faith.

The Lord's Supper also clearly shows the connection as well. For let us not forget that the Lord's Supper was instituted at a Passover meal. Just as the head of the house took the blood and spread it on the doorposts, so also Christ took the cup that would now symbolize His own blood. For us, we would not have to drink literal blood, for the blood of Christ was already shed. So we can see that the blood of Christ is more effective in blotting out our sins than the Passover lamb was. Jesus is the one final and climactic Passover Lamb. And so, both Sacraments tell us that Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb.

In applying these truths to our lives, then, we must see three things, and they come straight out of the text. First, we must have a Passover Lamb. For we richly deserve to die, and the only thing that can prevent us from suffering that ultimate punishment is the blood of the Passover Lamb. Is Christ your Passover Lamb? It is so sad that the Jews have not recognized Jesus as their Passover Lamb. For the very symbolism of the Passover points this way. It is very instructive that even the modern way they celebrate Passover shows Jesus Christ, for they have three large wafers of unleavened bread that are stacked one on top of the other. They take the middle wafer and hide it for part of the meal. Then after a certain amount of time, they retrieve the middle wafer, and then they break that wafer into pieces! How like the second person of the Trinity hidden in human flesh, and then, at the right time, broken for our transgressions!

Secondly, we must see how necessary it is to make a break with sin. Quite literally, we need to make a clean sweep of sin. The Israelites had to be ready to make a complete break with Egypt. And, coming to Christ but not leaving sin behind was just as sinful as the Israelites keeping any amount of yeast in the house. The penalty for that sin was severe. The person would be cut off from the people of Israel if they did not get rid of all the yeast in their house. In the Jewish celebration of the Passover, they would hide specks of yeast, and then let the children search for every last bit of yeast with a hyssop branch and a spoon. This symbolized getting rid of every last sin. We need to get rid of that sin! We must always remember to rely on God's power to do so. But we are commanded to put aside those sins that so easily entangle us. We must not despair at the remaining sin in our

lives. Instead, we should be encouraged that we can make a break with sin. But neither must we let our knowledge of remaining sin turn into a rationalization for leaving our sin the way it is.

Thirdly, and lastly, we must be ready to instruct our children and grandchildren about the things of God. Notice that there is a catechetical aspect to the Passover. The child was to ask the parent why they did these things, and why they believed these things. And then the parents were to tell their children about all the marvelous plagues God inflicted against the people of Egypt. That was redemption for the people of God. One of my church history professors used to say that the Christian life can be described as a combination of amnesia and *deja vu*. We are constantly forgetting things, but also remembering them. We can often say to ourselves, "I know that I've forgotten this some time before." In many ways, this was the pivotal event for the people of God in the Old Testament. The official new year would start with the Passover. That was salvation for Old Testament Israel, and it was always meant to look like what Jesus Christ would do.

Isn't it interesting that Moses is here given instructions for a long-lasting feast of remembrance before they even get out of Egypt? Salvation always points to worship. We can see this in the book of Exodus as a whole. Salvation leads to obedience, which leads to worship. That is the structure of the whole book of Exodus, and it is evident here in the fact that this liturgical instruction came to Moses before the Israelites were even out of Egypt. A lot of people think that salvation is the goal of the Christian life. That is not true, as important as salvation is. The worship of God is the goal of the Christian life. As John Piper puts it, "Evangelism exists because worship doesn't." Worship is the single most important thing we do in life. It is more important than our salvation, even. It is certainly more important than our jobs, and it is even more important than watching sports!

So point to your Passover Lamb, the one who takes away the sins of the world. Be ready to make a complete break with sin. Get rid of sin in your lives. And instruct your children about the greater Exodus that Jesus Christ has accomplished in interposing His precious blood between God and us, thus providing a propitiation for our sins.

Sermon Outline

I. Christ, Our Passover Lamb

A. Israel's Need and Our Need

B. Christ, the Perfect Fulfillment

C. Propitiation

II. Partaking of the Passover

A. "Partaking" Means a Clean Break with the Past

B. Illustrations

1. Baptism

2. Lord's Supper

III. Applications

A. We Need Christ, our Passover Lamb

B. We Need a Clean Break with Sin

C. We Need to Remember