

INTRODUCTION

Easter is five weeks from today. Over the next few weeks, we're going to walk with Jesus through 94 hours of events that changed the course of our world. The 94-hour period started when Jesus sat down with His disciples to eat the Passover Meal. It ended on Easter Sunday morning when the disciples discovered that the tomb was empty. Between these two events, Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane where He was crushed by the burden He was facing. Then He was arrested and put on trial. He was tortured at the hands of the Jews and Romans. Then after spending just six hours on the cross, He died. They removed His dead body from the cross, wrapped it in spices and placed it in a tomb. The last 72 hours of the countdown are in the tomb.

In addition to studying the Last Supper of Jesus, we're also going to participate in the Lord's Supper. This serving will be unique, because it will be the first time that I'll be leading the meal for Green Acres South and Crosswalk as well.

Mark 14:12-25. "On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, 'Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?' So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, 'Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.' The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, 'I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.' They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, 'Surely not I?' 'It is one of the Twelve,' he replied, 'one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.'"

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

One of the most famous paintings in the world is Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper." The original was painted in 1495 on the wall of a dining room in a Convent in Milan, Italy. The original work has faded through the centuries until the details could hardly be seen in the 1970s. The latest restoration took 21 years and was finished in 1999. In the restored version you can see that da Vinci tried to capture the moment when Peter is leaning over to John to ask him who will betray Jesus. Judas can be seen between them clutching the bag containing thirty pieces of silver.

However, this posed arrangement with everyone sitting on one side of the table as if they're having their picture made isn't the way they ate the Last Supper. The Bible says Jesus and the disciples were reclined at the table. They were probably arranged in a small circle around a low table reclining on their left elbows. In Jewish culture, the left hand was considered unclean, and the right hand was clean, so they would only eat with their right hands.

There are some important first truths that He shared at the Last Supper. Let's learn four of these truths because they still apply to us today.

1. THE LORD'S SUPPER INVOLVES CAREFUL PREPARATION

Jesus sent some of His disciples into Jerusalem and told them to find a room and to make preparations for the Passover. Every spring the Jews commemorated the time when they were slaves living in Egypt. God called Moses to tell Pharaoh to set the Hebrew people free from their bondage. Pharaoh refused. God sent a series of plagues to warn Pharaoh, but Pharaoh still refused, so God sent a final, deadly plague.

God warned the people that on a certain day the Death Angel would arrive in Egypt. The firstborn child in every family would die unless people followed His instructions. He told them to take a young lamb and slay it. Then the blood would be smeared on the doorposts and lintel of the door of their house. After that the lamb would be roasted and the family members would walk in under the blood and have a meal in which they would eat all the roasted lamb. Whenever the Death Angel saw the blood of the lamb applied to the doorpost, He would pass over that family and there would be no death. But when there was no blood applied, death would visit that home. For those who obeyed God, and trusted His Word, they could rest inside knowing God's Judgment would pass over them.

So for the Last Supper, what preparations were required? Passover was a 24-hour celebration that started at sundown on the 15th of Nissan and ended at sundown the next afternoon. The date of Passover this year is April 14, which is the Monday after Palm Sunday for us. The daylong Passover observance also ushered in a weeklong festival called "the feast of unleavened bread." For an entire week, the Jews only ate unleavened bread, which today is called Matzah (or Matzo). They ate unleavened bread to recall how quickly they had to leave Egypt. Over time, yeast came to represent the evil influence of the Egyptians that the Jews were leaving behind. It came to represent sin. Leaven, or yeast, is a tiny organism that seems powerless, but when you put it in flour and water, it goes to work and changes the entire shape of the dough. And once the leaven starts working, you can't stop it.

So the preparation for Passover involved preparing the food and drinks, but it also involved going through a house and making sure there was not a speck of leaven present. To this day, Jewish families conduct a deep cleaning of their home to remove any trace of leaven. This may be where we get the tradition of spring-cleaning our homes.

So before you partake this memorial meal today, you need to make some preparation. You need to do some personal house cleaning. But I'm not talking about the house where you live. I'm

talking about the house where Jesus lives, your life. The Jewish practice of getting rid of all leaven is a strong reminder to us that we should constantly be getting rid of sin in our lives.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth about the Lord's Supper, "Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)

As we prepare for this meal, you need to ask the Holy Spirit to shine His searchlight into the deepest darkest corners of your life. Is there anything there that needs to be swept out? Are there bad habits, anger, resentment, or lust particles hiding there? The Bible says the way we prepare for this meal is by getting rid of the leaven of malice and wickedness and replace it with the bread of sincerity and truth. Let's make preparations.

2. THE LORD'S SUPPER REQUIRES SELF-EXAMINATION

Usually the Passover meal was a happy family celebration. But there was a somber mood present at the last Supper. Have you ever been a family meal but because of something said the mood is ruined? It ruins your appetite as well. This was a tension-filled meal. Jesus dampened everyone's spirits by saying, "I tell you the truth. One of you will betray me tonight—one who is eating with me."

All twelve of the disciples went around the table and asked the same question. The grammar really has them asking, "It isn't me, is it?" There's doubt. Peter, John, James, "It isn't me, is it?" Matthew, Nathaniel, Simon, "It isn't me, is it?" Judas Iscariot, "It isn't me, is it?" But of course, Judas knew he was the one. It's important to note that Jesus didn't point His finger and say, "Bingo! It's you, Judas." Instead, after the same question from all twelve disciples, He said, "It is one of the Twelve. The one who dips bread with me in the same cup. I'm going to go, just as it is written. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man. It would have been better if he hadn't ever been born."

I think Jesus was giving Judas a chance to repent and correct his mistake. He didn't call him out by name, but Jesus knew. He warned Judas there would be tragic consequences to his bad choices.

The disciples didn't suspect Judas. He was the treasurer of the group, the one you trust the most. Each one honestly wondered if they would betray Jesus. They conducted a spiritual inventory and saw that the potential to fail the Lord was there. In Luke's account, Peter was the only who spoke and bragged that he would die with Jesus, but he would never leave him. And we know how that boast turned out, cock-a-doodle-do. And that night, one disciple betrayed Jesus and another disciple denied Jesus three times. But before the night was over, all the other disciples ran away into the night leaving Jesus alone.

At the meal, these disciples had to examine their hearts. Before we eat this meal, we should do the same thing. Paul wrote, "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup." (1 Corinthians 11:28)

These were the closest followers of Jesus, and on that night they all failed Him. What if I said, "This week, one of you is going to fail the Lord in a huge way." The wrong response for you is: "Not me! Nope. I could NEVER fail the Lord." Be careful, there may be a rooster around somewhere. A more humble response would be, "It's not me, is it?" Regardless of how close you are to the Lord there is the possibility that you could fail Him. That's why we all need His grace every minute of every day. So examine your hearts this morning.

3. THE LORD'S SUPPER SYMBOLIZES A POWERFUL REPRESENTATION

Our Catholic friends celebrate Mass every time they meet. One reason is because they teach that the bread literally becomes the body of Jesus and the wine literally becomes the blood of Jesus. To them, it's a miracle. Have you ever wondered why magicians often say, "hocus pocus?" It comes directly from the Latin words a priest speaks over the bread, "*Hoc est corpus meum.*"

We don't believe that this bread literally becomes the flesh of Jesus. Nor do we believe that this grape juice morphs into real blood. To us, the bread represents the body of Jesus. The cup represents the blood of Jesus. Jesus left us a powerful symbolic teaching tool to remind us of His sacrifice. Jesus wasn't trying to institute some kind of liturgical observance; He was giving us a simple memory lesson.

The Bible says, "The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

A pastor's wife was trying to explain communion to her five-year-old daughter. She whispered, "This bread isn't Jesus' body, it just reminds of His body." Then when they took the cup she said, "This grape juice isn't really blood. It's just to remind us of the blood of Jesus." Her daughter nodded as if she understood. A few days later the mother told her daughter that her dad would be late coming home that night because he had stopped at the local blood bank to donate blood so that sick people could use it. The girl thought for a moment and said, "But we know that he's really just giving them grape juice, right?"

The bread and cup are symbols, but what they represent is very real. At the meal, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples. In the same way, Jesus' body was broken. The soldiers broke Him down through torture and abuse. To fulfill scripture, not a bone of His body was broken, but the whip shredded the flesh on His back. His brow was broken open by the crown of thorns. His hands and feet were broken open by the nails.

His precious blood was poured out that day to make atonement for our sins. Once a year the High Priest observed Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, by taking the blood of a lamb without spot or blemish. He moved aside the thick curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the world. He entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood on the Mercy Seat. But when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. It was God's way of saying, "A new way has been opened to my Presence. It is through the blood of Jesus."

Pastor Jim Cymbala has written a book entitled *Fresh Power*. In it he tells the story of a lady who started working in a church in the Midwest as the music leader. One Sunday, she led them to sing several great hymns about the blood of Jesus. The pastor was upset and warned her that if she wanted to keep her job, she would never lead another song about the blood of Christ. He said that they had moved beyond that crude symbolism. (*Fresh Power*, p. 57). The woman left the church and found one that sang songs about the precious blood of Jesus. I thank God that we haven't moved beyond that symbolism!

4. THE LORD'S SUPPER PRODUCES JOYFUL ANTICIPATION

We call this the Last Supper, but that's not really true. Jesus looked forward to a time in the future when He would be alive, and He would celebrate a feast in the Kingdom of God. This will be a future time of reunion, refreshment, and rejoicing. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:25)

Those who know and love Jesus will be invited to a great Wedding Banquet in heaven just before Jesus returns to win the final battle on earth. We read these words in Revelation, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.'...Then the angel said to me, 'Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" (Revelation 19:7, 9)

You're invited. Will you accept the invitation? Have you given Jesus your RSVP? There is a deadline to accepting your invitation. If you die or Jesus returns before you accept this invitation, it becomes null and void.

So if you haven't made your reservations to this wedding banquet you can make them today. Your confirmation number is JN316. "For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

CONCLUSION

I enjoy participating in the Jewish Passover meal because there are many symbolic blessings for us. Today, with the exception of some Sephardic Jews in Spain, Jewish families no longer eat a lamb at Passover. Since there is no longer a Temple, a lamb doesn't have to be slain. Most Jews eat turkey, chicken or beef, but they have a lamb shank bone at the meal as a reminder of the Passover Lamb.

Instead of eating the lamb, the Jews have instituted a custom called Yachatz. Early in the meal, they take three pieces of Matzah bread. They take the center of the three pieces and break it into two pieces. They wrap it in a napkin and set it aside. While the children close their eyes, they hide it. It's called *afikomen*, which literally means "dessert." At the end of the meal, usually three hours later, a child is allowed to find it. There is great rejoicing when the child produces the hidden bread. Then they unwrap it from the napkin and give a piece of it to everyone at the dinner. It's the last thing that is eaten. It is to symbolize that they are satisfied and want nothing more to eat.

This practice goes back to 400 years before Jesus. But to us, it says something about Jesus. We serve a Triune God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Son came and His Body was broken for us. They took Him from the cross and buried him, wrapped in a burial cloth. He was hidden for three days, but when they found He was alive, it was cause for great rejoicing. And when you receive the Bread of Life, you are satisfied— nothing else quenches your hunger besides Jesus.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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