

Freedom Means... Sacrifices Are Made
Exodus 12:1-7 (AFBC 7/22/18)

Preparation for the Supper:
The Passover Lamb--Luke 22:7-13

7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

8 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

9 "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. 10 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, 11 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?'

12 He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there." 13 They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

Serving the Supper:

The Bread: "This is my body, broken for you."
Anthem: *In Remembrance of Me*

The Cup: "This is my blood shed for you."
Anthem: *Lest I Forget Thy Love*

A Reflection on the Meaning of the Meal:

Having just shared the Lord's Supper together, I want us to spend a few moments now reflecting on what it means. We'll do this by exploring its roots—roots that reach deep into the ancient Biblical texts and into the very heart of God's redemptive plan for us.

This morning, we return to the book of Exodus and to our theme of freedom. Freedom always means, it seems, that sacrifices have to be made. Hold that thought as we look at our text:

Exodus 12:1-7

¹ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ² "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³ Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ⁴ If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. ⁵ The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.

⁶ Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷ Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.

It was on a Thursday when Jesus and His disciples gathered in a rooftop room—the Upper Room--in Jerusalem. He would be crucified the next day—Friday; but this was Passover; and Jesus and His friends were doing exactly what they did every Passover.

They shared a meal together—a meal that had first been served over 1400 years earlier. It dated all the way back to the Hebrews' last days of captivity in Egypt—their last days of slavery.

Earlier in the day, Jesus had sent Peter and John to prepare the meal. They found the room by following a man who was carrying a jar of water—a job normally reserved for women—so it was easy to spot a man doing this. He led them to the right place.

Sometime between 2:30 and 5:30 that afternoon, they would have sacrificed a lamb at the Temple. It would be the centerpiece of their Passover Meal—a bit like the turkey at our Thanksgiving meals--except the Lamb... had far greater significance.

Now, when we think of the Last Supper, we tend to put more emphasis on the bread and wine. That's because the meal that Jesus instituted for us that night—the one we just shared-- included only these two elements: the bread and the cup.

So we think of the bread and wine; but for them, although they also had bread and wine at their meal, their focus... was on the lamb.

What I want to suggest to you this morning is that if we understand the meaning of this meal—if we know and embrace the Truth of God behind it--again, that Truth that sets us free-- the Lamb will actually be an important part of our focus as well.

Important, in this way: the bread and wine direct our attention to the Lamb who was slain. John the Baptist was speaking prophetically when he saw Jesus and announced: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Let's go back now to that first Passover meal and see what it means for us and how it connects with this Supper that our Lord instituted for us in the Upper Room.

Travel in time with me back to those final days of the Hebrews' captivity in Egypt. We all know the story—how they were enslaved by the Egyptians... but God had decided it was now time for His people to be free.

1. There are only two simple truths that I want to share with you about this, but they're both vital to what the Bible says about freedom. The first is this: **FREEDOM IS A LIFE AND DEATH MATTER FOR GOD.**

You remember the ten plagues the Egyptians suffered through. Pharaoh was pretty stubborn when it came to freeing his slaves. He refused to listen to Moses' warnings. As a result, some awful things befell the Egyptians:

1) The water of the Nile River was turned to blood; 2) frogs covered the land; 3) then came the gnats; 4) and later, flies. 5) The livestock was stricken; 6) painful sores covered the people; 7) and a destructive hailstorm ruined their crops.

8) Then came the plague of locusts, 9) and the plague of darkness--but through all of these, Pharaoh stood his ground. He refused to give God's people their freedom.

It took something even worse—and psychologists tell us that the single most traumatic and painful thing a person can experience in life is the death of their child.

It took the death of Pharaoh's own child and the deaths of all the other firstborns among the people of Egypt to change his mind and convince him—finally--to let those people go.

This was a terrible grief for the Egyptians to bear; but it seems, for some reason, to take extreme measures for that vicious cycle of sinful bondage to come to an end. So God went to extremes to convince Pharaoh to set His people free.

God sent a plague of death upon the Egyptians. He made it clear that human bondage is a matter of life and death—and it still is.

We need to understand that the strongest bondage we face is bondage to sin--for the wages of sin is death—not just physical death—which might seem bad enough--but spiritual death. Bound by the power of sin—enslaved by sin--we die.

We die to God, who is the source of all life. So our bondage to sin, and finding the way to be released from that bondage, is the most critical life and death issue we face. This is why it matters so much to God. He loves us and wants us to live free!

2. Now, a second truth we find in the Passover story: **FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE IS WHAT GOD OFFERS HIS PEOPLE.** He provides a way out—a way for us to know freedom.

For the ancient Israelites, their freedom involved the sacrifice of a lamb. A lamb was brought into each household. For four days, they examined it to make sure it was without blemish.

Then the lamb was slaughtered. Some of its blood was sprinkled on the doorpost of the home. The meat was cooked and eaten.

To gain their freedom, the Israelites sacrificed something. The Egyptians did too. The difference, though, was that the Egyptians sacrificed their firstborn children. This was the awful price they paid for their hard-heartedness and disobedience to God.

But God provided a way to avoid death: they could sacrifice a lamb instead. Any family that killed a lamb and sprinkled its blood on the doorpost was spared the death angel. It “passed over” them. No one had to die—except the lamb!

But why any death at all? We tend to be uncomfortable with the idea of sacrifice today. We wonder why God didn’t bring about freedom for his people in some less costly way?

Why did anything, let alone any-ONE, have to die? The only answer we can give is that sacrifice is God’s way of dealing with sin. It is the way God chose to set us free from sin’s bondage.

In Hebrew 9:22, we read, “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.” Maybe God takes such extreme measures in dealing with our sin to impress upon us how serious it is—that sin is that destructive to our lives and families—that it’s deadly. It’s not easy for God to get this truth across to us.

He knows we tend to be far too casual about sin. We minimize its significance...even to the point of making light of it. Nobody’s perfect, after all. Besides, just how much can a little sin hurt?!?

But then we remember... “the Lamb that was slain;” and we know that God takes sin seriously. Sacrifice—however offensive it seems to us—it’s the way God wakes us up to the true nature of sin: the way it enslaves us and destroys our lives.

The Passover helps us to understand that, to God, death has always been the price of freedom for people who are enslaved. The Lamb becomes the ransom that purchases our freedom.

It makes sense, really. It shouldn’t come as a surprise that God, who is the Giver of life, and who at the same time is holy and without sin, should require the forfeiture of our lives as the penalty for sin. Again, “the wages of sin is death.” It makes sense—it’s just.

What should surprise us, though—while filling our hearts with gratitude and praise--is that God would choose to make this sacrifice for us—that He would give up the life of His only begotten Son...so that we would not have to face sin's death penalty ourselves.

That should leave us awe-struck, friends, as we struggle to comprehend God's graciousness and love... that doesn't make sense to us. It cannot make sense—except in the heart of God.

"Behold the Lamb of God," said the Apostle John. Make no mistake—when John spoke these words, he had in mind the Passover Lamb. "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

John knew that the prophets before him had said this day would come—that all the centuries of slaughtered Passover lambs were simply preparing God's people for the Lamb who was to come. Listen to what Isaiah said about Him:

"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:5-6)

My iniquity and yours--our sin--laid upon Jesus, the precious Lamb without spot or blemish—until He became sin for us—until He incorporated my sin and yours into Himself—and because of this... was wounded and bruised and sacrificed... for us.

This is the Truth. Christ came to be our sacrificial Lamb—to cleanse us from sin and save us from death and destruction. Jesus Christ, our Living Lord, now offers the likes of you and me... eternal life.

He came, friends, to set the captives free!—to set all of us free. His Truth, and only His Truth, sets us free! Thanks be to God!

Freedom Means... Sacrifices Are Made
Exodus 12:1-7 (AFBC 7/22/18)

Preparation for the Supper:
The Passover Lamb--Luke 22:7-13

Verse 8: Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

Serving the Supper:

**The Bread: "This is my body, broken for you."
 Anthem: *In Remembrance of Me***

**The Cup: "This is my blood shed for you."
 Anthem: *Lest I Forget Thy Love***

Reflecting on the Meaning of the Meal

Jesus and His disciples shared the Passover meal together just as the Jewish people had done for over 1400 years, dating back to their last days of captivity in Egypt.

We think of the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper; but for them, the focus was on the lamb. For us, too, the bread and wine point us back to the Lamb that was slain.

FREEDOM IS A LIFE AND DEATH MATTER FOR GOD.

The strongest bondage any person ever faces is bondage to sin--for the wages of sin is death.

FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE IS WHAT GOD OFFERS US.

Hebrew 9:22--"Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness."

We remember "the Lamb that was slain," and we know that God takes sin seriously. Sacrifice—however offensive it seems to us--is the way God wakes us up to the true nature of sin: the way it enslaves us and destroys our lives.

"Behold the Lamb of God..." When John spoke these words, he had in mind the Passover Lamb. (cf. John 1:29)

"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:5-6)