LAST PASSOVER, FIRST LORD’S SUPPER

Matthew 26:17-30

In last week’s lesson Jesus talked at length with His disciples about His return. This week He talks about His departure. Obviously if He is going to return He must first depart and we know that His disciples were very much confused by this. The setting is that it’s Thursday, just one day before Jesus will go to the cross. Jesus and His disciples are preparing for the Passover. Does anyone remember why the Jews celebrated the Passover? What did it commemorate? [Instituted by God thru Moses for the nation in Exodus 12 and 13. The Passover was observed on a specific day, the 14th day of the month Abib, the first month of the Jewish calendar. Later in Israel’s history after the Babylonian captivity the name of that month was changed to Nisan]. So the Passover fell on a different day of the week each year (like Christmas or July 4th). The Passover, which involved a meal, was followed by a week of eating unleavened bread. This became known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread because at the end of the seven days they held a feast. So thru the years the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread became synonymous with each other, all told it was an 8-day festival. Also, according to Jewish law (Mishnah) the Passover had to be celebrated in the city of Jerusalem. The Passover focused on dealing with the people’s sin, the death of an innocent animal atoning for the sin of the guilty. The Feast of Unleavened Bread focused on the people cutting themselves off from worldly things. So much preparation is required for the Passover meal.

READ Matthew 26:17-19

“A certain man” seems pretty indefinite. Mark and Luke tell us that this certain man will be carrying a jar of water. Follow him and he will lead you to a certain house. Talk to the master of that house and say… [v 18] The master of the house will then lead you to a large upper room and that is where we will celebrate the Passover together.

“The disciples” is not all 12. Luke tells us that it was only Peter and John who went to procure the place. Notice that Jesus says, “My time is at hand.” In our lesson from John 7, which takes place about 6 months prior to this, Jesus had told His brothers “My time has not yet come,” of course referring to His death at the hands of those men who wanted to kill Him. Now Jesus’ time has come and He is fully aware of it.

Everything is set, the disciples get everything ready and on Thursday evening Jesus and His disciples celebrate the Passover. READ Matthew 26:20. They recline at the table in the upper room eating the Passover meal together.

The order of the Passover meal was (1) drinking a cup of red wine mixed with water; (2) ceremonial washing of hands, symbolizing the need for spiritual cleansing; (3) eating bitter herbs, symbolizing bondage in Egypt; (4) drinking a 2nd cup of wine, head of household (in this case Jesus) explains the meaning of the Passover; (5) singing first 2 hymns of the Hallel (Psalms 113-114); (6) bringing the lamb out, head of household distributes meat with the unleavened bread; (7) drinking a 3rd cup of wine, known as the “cup of blessing.” It is this cup that Jesus would later use to symbolize His shed blood, v 23.

It is helpful to read the parallel gospel accounts to get a full understanding of everything that’s going on. Luke has a lengthy account of how a dispute arose among the disciples about who would be the greatest in the coming kingdom (apparently they still thought Jesus would soon be setting up His kingdom). Jesus rebukes them for this. In John’s account he mentions Jesus washing His disciple’s feet. It is very possible, and it would be just like Jesus, to use this opportunity to teach them a lesson in humility… the Master taking on the role of a servant to wash His own disciple’s feet.

Now we come to the part where Jesus will expose the traitor who is among them. But before we get to that, let me take this opportunity to address one of the so-called controversies in the Bible. There is no doubt as you read Matthew, Mark and Luke’s accounts that Jesus is celebrating the Passover in the upper room with His disciple on Thursday night. But then you come to John 18:28: “Then they [the Jewish leaders] led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor’s [Pilate’s] headquarters. It was early morning [Friday morning, the next day]. They themselves did not enter the governor’s headquarters, so that they would not be defiled [because Pilate was a Gentile], but could eat the Passover. Explain chart, Harold Hoehner theory.

READ Matthew 26:21-25

The disciples are “bum-fuzzled.” Jesus has just dropped a bombshell on them. One of them – one of His own disciples – is going to betray Him! And they looked at each other, deeply saddened by what Jesus had said – asking, “Is it I, Lord? Could it be me? Surely not me!” Luke says that they began to question each other as to which one of them it might be who would do this. According to our passage here in Matthew, v 23, Jesus tells them, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.” Well that didn’t help much because all of them at this point had done that. In John’s account Peter asks John, who is sitting next to Jesus, to ask Jesus who He was speaking about. So John asks Jesus directly, “Who is it, Lord?” Jesus answers, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So Jesus dips the piece of bread and gives it to Judas. So at this point John knows who it is, but none of the other disciples know. Back to Matthew 26 – Judas, who is sitting on the other side of Jesus, knows full well that he is the one who will betray Jesus. But he wants to fit in with the other disciples who are all asking, “Is it I?” So Judas answers Jesus, v 25, “Is it I, Rabbi?” Jesus says to Judas: “You have said so.” In other words, “You said it – out of your own mouth.”

At this point John records that Satan enters into Judas and that Jesus tells Judas, “Get out, what you do, do it quickly.” And Judas leaves. None of the disciples, except for John, knows why Judas is leaving prior to the actual meal. According to John’s account none of them heard what Jesus had said to Judas. They are all thinking that perhaps, Judas being the group’s treasurer, is going out to give money to the poor or that maybe he is going out to get something they need for the feast. So at this point, except for John and Jesus, none of the disciples are aware that Judas is the betrayer. They’re still processing what Jesus had told them.

As I studied this passage I saw this as indicative of Jesus’ grace. First He doesn’t embarrass Judas in front of the group. Second He’s actually giving Judas an opportunity to back out of his diabolical plan to betray Jesus.

This passage is also a great example of how the sovereignty of God works hand-in-hand with the free will of man. Judas has the wrong priorities, made of his own volition. He is driven by financial gain. Previous to this he had approached the chief priests and been paid 30 pieces of silver to deliver Jesus over to them. Jesus knew this. Which is why He had not told the rest of the disciples where they would celebrate the Passover. Only Peter and John knew. If Judas had known he would have undoubtedly told the chief priests and they would have gone and arrested Jesus in the upper room. But Jesus needs this time with His disciples to share with them what is on His heart and pray for them. He needs to celebrate the Passover. He needs to institute a new covenant. So what I want you to see is that on one hand Judas is operating of his own free will. Satan will enter into him later, the night of the actual betrayal. But up to that point Judas is doing what Judas wants to do. He chooses of his own free will to betray his Master. And yet on the other hand there is the sovereign plan of God. This is what is supposed to happen according to God’s plan. Listen to Peter’s words as he preached on the day of Pentecost: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” (Acts 2:22-24) It was all part of God’s sovereign plan of redemption. Read Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 – Messiah had to suffer and die. Up to the end Judas has an opportunity to repent, but he chooses not to. And it all worked as part of God’s plan.

So when Jesus institutes what would later be called the Lord’s Supper Judas is not there (per Matthew and Mark’s account Judas leaves prior, Luke has Jesus saying after the Lord’s Supper: “For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” And then the disciples question one another about who would do this. But no mention of Judas. So apparently Jesus repeats His earlier condemnation of His betrayer after the Lord’s Supper is over. Remember, the disciples are unaware that Judas is the betrayer. Only John knows and he hasn’t said anything. The disciples will find out that Judas is the betrayer later that evening in the Garden of Gethsemane.

READ Matthew 26:26-30

Keep in mind that this is done in conjunction with the Passover meal.

The word “Eucharist” is a transliteration of the Greek word *eucharistia*, which is itself a translation of the Hebrew word *berekah*. All three words have the meaning of thanksgiving. Per Luke’s account Jesus offers up thanks to God both when He takes the unleavened bread and the cup of wine.

“This is my body,” v 26, and “this is my blood,” v 28 are imagery. The bread symbolizes Jesus’ body and the cup of wine symbolizes Jesus blood. This use of imagery is no different than when Jesus had said, “I am the vine” or “I am the living water” or “I am the bread of life.” It’s a vivid picture of the work that Jesus does in sustaining those who place their faith in Him. The Catholics hold to the belief of trans-substantiation where they say the bread literally becomes the body of Christ and the wine literally becomes the blood of Christ. With all due respect they’ve missed the point of Jesus use of imagery. But the Catholics are in good company. So did the Pharisees in Jesus’ day. In John 6 when Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” the Jews said, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” They too missed the spiritual point that Jesus was making. The bread represents Jesus body sacrificed on the cross for you and for me. The wine represents Jesus’ blood shed for you and for me. Paul in 1 Cor 11 under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit records the words of Jesus Himself to His disciples that night. “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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 also He took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”

Both Paul and Jesus mention the blood of the covenant, the new covenant. The cost of God’s reconciliation of man has always been the shedding of blood. Hebrews 9:22 tells us that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” It’s been that way from the beginning. In Genesis God kills an animal to cover Adam and Eve with skins, the first sacrifice. Abel brings a sacrifice that pleases God, the sacrifice of an animal from his own flock. In Exodus there is the Passover lamb or goat sacrificed for sins of the household. In Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy the shedding of the blood of animals upon an altar for sins is the practice instituted for God’s covenant people.

For 1500 years the Jews celebrated the Passover every year, one of their oldest traditions. Millions of animals slaughtered for the sins of the people from the days of Egyptian slavery up until Jesus’ day. But Jesus brings the Passover to an end. He, our King, became our High Priest and ultimately our sacrificial Lamb and our Savior when He went to the cross and died for us. Hebrews 8 says the old covenant is obsolete. That’s why we don’t celebrate the Passover any more. It’s been replaced with a new covenant, a “better covenant.” We have a new covenant in His blood.

“For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Heb 9:23-25) By the way, that’s something none of those millions of animals could ever do.

And that, my dear friends is worth celebrating. That’s something worth singing about! And just as the disciples did in v 30 – they sung a hymn – and so shall we.