

TITLE: "The Sacrificial Lamb"

TEXT: Exodus 12:1-13, 21-23, 29-30 (OT pp. 58-59) and Luke 22:7-20 (NT p. 86)

Exodus 12:1-13, 21-23, 29-30

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it.

⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.

¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

²¹Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb. ²²Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. ²³For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down.

²⁹At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. ³⁰Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

Luke 22:7-20

⁷Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it."

⁹They asked him, "Where do you want us to make preparations for it?"

¹⁰"Listen," [Jesus] said to them, "when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters ¹¹and say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' ¹²He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there."

¹³So they went and found everything as [Jesus] had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁴When the hour came, [Jesus] took his place at the table, and the apostles with him.

¹⁵[Jesus] said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹Then [Jesus] took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰And [Jesus] did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Part of our heritage of faith is rather revolting. As you heard from our Old Testament reading, it involved the killing of a lamb, the roasting of that lamb and then the eating of that lamb. The original Passover had a purpose, and a very serious one. The people were to take some of the blood from the slaughtered lamb and put it around the doors of their homes so that the Lord would “pass over” their homes and spare their first born. In the homes of those who did not do this, their first born child died.

In the Old Testament, or Old Covenant, God determined that the blood of an innocent lamb would spare the Israelites and that the blood of other sacrifices was used in the forgiveness of sins. In fact, in Hebrews 9:22 God says: “...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Why DOES God make a correlation between life, forgiveness and sacrificial blood?

I don't know. When I was a child, my will and my parent's will seemed to conflict fairly often. Sometimes I received a clear and cogent reason as to WHY I had to do certain things. Other times my mother or father would simply say: “Because I said so.” I didn't understand it, or LIKE it, but it was their decision. We may not LIKE or understand the fact that lambs were slaughtered and their blood spread around doorframes, but the correlation of sacrificial blood, life and forgiveness are God's decision.

It was no accident that thirteen hundred years or so after the first Passover, Jesus was nailed to the cross during the Passover celebration. Three years before his crucifixion, when John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). The OLD Covenant between God and His people was marked by the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. The NEW Covenant between God and His people is marked by the sacrifice of the Son of God.

The Jews still observe the Old Covenant by celebrating the Passover each year. We, as Christians, observe the New Covenant by remembering the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and celebrating His resurrection each year.

But here's the problem I wish to address this evening. We celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and the next Sunday we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, and we conveniently leave out all the pain and suffering Jesus actually went through. This should not be. We should NEVER forget the actual sacrifice Jesus made upon the cross that allows God to pass over our sins and gives us life everlasting in the kingdom of heaven.

Jeff Jolly teaches music at Belen High School in New Mexico. He is also the director of music at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque. Chuck Nydam, was on a study tour with him in 2003 and he gave Chuck this piece he had written, and Chuck gave it to me. It called "Killin' Chickens."

Beggin' your pardon, ma'am. Beggin' your pardon, sir. It is not that I'm settin' out to offend your sensibilities. It's just that some things need sayin'. And some things can't be said but one way.

"Why DO they need sayin'?" you ask. Because, in every generation they need sayin'. And maybe there aren't enough folks sayin' 'em right now. Or maybe it isn't bein' said loud enough. Or maybe not too many folks are listenin'.

It's kina like killin' chickens. Most folks want to eat the birds, but they'd just as soon somebody else did the slaughterin'. We'd all rather eat the meat without havin' to see the blood actually shed to sustain us. Keep the feathers, claws and comb at the butcher's. Don't make us look that bird in the eye. PAY someone else to eviscerate the poor dumb beast.

My mama grew up on a farm in Kansas. Grandma used to out to the barnyard on Sunday after church, grab one of the roosters that wasn't needed for breedin', hold it by the head and sling it around a few times in quick jerks to wring its neck. Or Grandpa would get the ax and chop its head off. Then it'd run around the yard for a few minutes, headless and senseless, its nervous system reactin' to this ultimate violation of the body. Then hot water to loosen the feathers, or just skin the bird, clean out the insides, and Grandma had it roastin' in no time.

The family gathered around the table, holdin' hands, while Grandpa said grace. Or rather gave thanks for the grace of a benevolent God who provides food to nourish the body; God who provides family to nourish our human identity; God who provides death and sacrifice to nourish a sense of the value of life; and God who provides a Savior to nourish the Spirit in faith and hope.

These days we go to the grocer's for boneless chicken breasts and four-course meals in microwaveable plastic packages—instant food in mass-produced, prefabricated, processed, homogenized, sterilized, analyzed and itemized, vitamin enriched, reconstituted food devoid of blood or breath or any semblance of having once been a living thing.

Not, you understand, that any of these modern innovations is a necessary evil. It's not wrong to improve standards of health or the quality of life. But in our constant quest for convenience, we sometimes sacrifice perspective. I'd wager few families sit at a table, hold hands and give thanks for the grace of a benevolent God who provides spiced luncheon meat and processed cheese spread, in the same way we used to say grace over the old red rooster from the barnyard.

Most people nowadays want a life of smooth finished wood, of gilded gowns on sculpted bodies, of comfortably cushioned chairs. They want to cross between this world and the next without excessive discomfort. They want a risen Lord withOUT thinking about a crucified Lord.

But, part of our heritage as Christians is that lambs WERE slaughtered. And our forgiveness, our relationship with God and our eternal life in heaven all depend entirely upon the fact that Jesus was nailed to the cross and he bled there and there he died for us. That is easy to forget because it is so distasteful to imagine. But there it is.

And, you know, it's also easy to forget that because Jesus sacrificed himself for us, that we, as the followers of Jesus, are to sacrifice ourselves.

We ARE to give a LOT to support the mission and ministry of the church.

We ARE to love the unlovable and the unlovely.

We ARE to go to our church meetings rather than watch TV shows.

We are to go to church Sunday rather than stay in bed or go out to breakfast.

We ARE to bring our kids and grandkids to Sunday school and youth group.

We ARE to pray, and read the Bible and study the Bible.

God does not want us to forget to make sacrifices. God does not want us to forget the sacrifice his Son Jesus made. God doesn't even want the creatures in heaven to forget the sacrifice of Jesus. When the Apostle John was taken up into heaven, this is what he saw (Revelation5):

⁶Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered... ⁷He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. ⁸When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹They sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; ¹⁰you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth."

¹¹Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹²singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" ¹⁴And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

So, is it worth it for us, as Christians, to think of bloody lambs, to make sacrifices each day and to gather together and eat a piece of bread that REMINDS us of the wounded dying body of Jesus and drink juice that REMINDS us of his blood dripping upon the rough wood of the cross?

Here's what Jesus says to us this evening (John 6:51-54):

⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. ...Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.

Sometimes it may NOT seem worth all we go through as Christians. But, when we ARE raised up on the Last Day, and when we SEE the Lamb of God, and when we fall down and worship Jesus right along with the elders and all the creatures of heaven, then we will KNOW that our faith was worth it. And it will be worth it in a hundred years, in a thousand years, in a million years and for billions of years to follow.

Amen.