

The Breaking of Bread and the Passover Lamb

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TAKING CHRIST'S LOVE TO THE WORLD

THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND THE PASSOVER LAMB

Ex.12:3-28; Lk.22:14-30; and 1Cor.11:23-34

The “line of scarlet thread” linking these three Scriptures together is the Lamb of God sacrificed for our redemption, typified in the Passover Lamb and accomplished in the sacrificed Lamb and now lovingly remembered in the Breaking of Bread as the Lamb of God once slain but now seated on the throne (Rev.5:6). The use of the scarlet thread draped from the upper window of Rahab’s home as a link for each Scripture is suited to our purpose because the scarlet thread symbolized the blood “sprinkled” for protection from the destroying angel, foreshadowing the “sprinkling” of the blood of Jesus (1Pet.1:19). The application of the blood of Jesus to the heart is described by John as the cleansing of the blood (1Jn.1:7-9). The writer to the Hebrews refers to the blood that “sprinkled” the heart from an evil conscience (Heb.10:22).

THE PASSOVER MEAL

(Mat.26:20-35; Mk.14:18-25; Lk.22:14-30; Jn.13:1-38)

We begin with the central Scripture which is an account of the Passover which Jesus celebrated with His disciples before He went to Gethsemane. Jesus transformed the meal into one that would in the future commemorate His sacrifice on the cross. The unleavened bread becomes a symbol of His broken body and the wine becomes a symbol or token of His shed blood. *“This is **my** body which is given for you” and “**my** blood which is shed for you.”* Jesus said to His disciples, *“I am the bread of Life ... I am the living bread which came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread he will live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”* (Jn.6:51).

The Passover meal points back retrospectively to the Exodus and forwards to the Lord’s Supper, now celebrated in the context of the fellowship/communion of believers.

John's account of the Last Supper is different from the three synoptic. Central to John is Jesus' washing the feet of the disciples and the teaching which accompanied this act. I have discussed this in a separate article entitled "Foot Washing."

There are clear parallels between the events surrounding the eating of the Passover Lamb which preceded the Exodus and the eating of the Passover meal which preceded Gethsemane and the betrayal, the trial of Jesus and His crucifixion. Both meals were overshadowed by imminent judgment and death. The human element of fear was strongly present. For Jesus to say that one of His intimate disciples would soon betray Him sent shock waves through the disciples, "*Is it I?*" on their lips awakened fear and insecurity in their troubled hearts. Peter denies any such possibility, but Jesus firmly corrects his brash avowal of loyalty by prophesying his betrayal of Him. Peter's wild action with his sword showed the turmoil in his heart. Peter's action precipitated a hasty exit of Jesus' disciples leaving Him alone to face those who came to take Him. From this point on Jesus lost His freedom and became a prisoner. Peter's betrayal was precipitated by fear and resulted in immediate brokenness and repentance. Judas' was wilful and satanically motivated, resulting in mortification but not repentance.

When we discuss the Breaking of Bread in the Corinthian church I will emphasise the pastoral dimension that Paul introduced into the meal. The first believers were so in love with Jesus and each other that they were "*breaking bread from house to house*" (Acts 2:46); it took place quite informally in the home. There is a further reference to breaking bread that took place when Paul was visiting the church at Troas. We read that, "*upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread*" (Acts 20:7 cf. 1Cor.11:30; 16:2).

The rich typology of the **Lamb** takes us back in Scripture to Gen.Ch.22 when Abraham was to sacrifice his son. In response to Isaac's question about the absence of a sacrificial animal Abraham replied by uttering a prophetic word that reaches to the very heart of the cross, "*And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering*" (Gen.22:8). The historical event that is described there on Mount Moriah (later the temple was built here) is rich in typology. This method of biblical interpretation called typology is a legitimate hermeneutical tool which

unfortunately has been discredited by unwarranted liberties with the meaning of Scripture. Sometimes Scripture is written to give us clues and to encourage us to find hidden meanings in the text. The Bible is a wonderful book and we need to employ our imagination as well as our mind in pursuit of its hidden treasures. The Holy Spirit engages every faculty of the heart when we meditate and study the Word of God.

The typology of the Lamb takes us forwards to the prophetic declaration of John Baptist, *“Behold the **Lamb of God** who takes away the sin of the world”* (Jn.1:29) and to the first letter of Peter who begins his letter by describing the scattered saints as the *“elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”* (1Pet.1:2). He reminds them that they were redeemed *“with the precious blood of Christ, as of a **Lamb** without blemish and without spot”* (1:19 cf. Ex.12:5). The statement by John Baptist refers back to the Pascal Lamb of Exodus and to the Suffering Servant passage (Isa.52:13-53:12); specifically in the latter reference, *“he is brought as a **lamb** to the slaughter”* (53:7). Paul says, *“For even Christ our **Passover lamb** is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven ... but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”* (1Cor.5:6-8). Paul’s reference to leaven takes us back to the Passover.

A good place to start to study this subject of the Lamb is Gen.Ch.22 and to see what insights it gives about the cross and the work of Christ in redemption. If you wish to engage in further Bible study on the “Lamb” and “the blood” I suggest that you study the Day of Atonement in Lev.Ch.16 (Heb.9:12) and the book of Hebrews which centres on the spiritual significance of the tabernacle, the sacrificial system and the priesthood. Conclude your study in the book of Revelation where you will find further revelation about the Lamb, which is one of the key titles of John for the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE PASSOVER LAMB

(Ex.12:3-28)

Eating the **Passover lamb** inevitably turned Jesus’ thoughts back to that eventful night when the destroying angel passed over Egypt killing every first born child in

every family in the land. The Pascal Lamb was pivotal in providing protection for the Jewish firstborn by the blood which had to be sprinkled on the door posts and lintel of each Jewish home. "When I see the blood I will pass over you." Before the lamb was suitable for sacrifice it had to be carefully observed. Imagine a Jewish family taking a young lamb and placing it in a small pen outside the house and each day the children with Dad and Mum watch and observe the lamb to see if it developed any defects. Only a perfect lamb was suitable for sacrifice (Ex.12:5 cf. 1Pet.1:19). The day approached when it was due to be killed and a hush came over the family as they approached the moment of sacrifice on that final eventful day when at midnight the destroying angel would pass through the land of Egypt to kill the firstborn of every family. In the book of Revelation John sees a vision in heaven which he describes, *"And I beheld, and, lo, in the middle of the throne and of the four living creatures, and of the elders stood a Lamb as it had been freshly slain"* (Rev.5:6). The literal meaning of the word for lamb is *"little lamb"* and John observes that it has been *"freshly slain,"* it has only just been killed. It doesn't require any imagination to link this vision of John with the little Pascal Lamb whose blood is taken in a bowl and sprinkled on the posts and the lintel of the door. The family are now safe, protected by the blood of the sacrificial lamb.

The lamb also provided nourishing meat to sustain the families who were waiting and ready to escape out of Egypt in a mass exodus of people. Their readiness was shown by the fact that they were eating while they were standing with their coats and shoes on. The atmosphere was charged with anticipation and no doubt with some trepidation and fear. Each family took with them their belonging including clothes, bedding, utensils, food, grinding wheel, animals, their children and old grandparents. This was going to be the Exodus to be remembered forever in the annals of Israel and commemorated by the angels in the Song of Moses (Rev.15:3). Their exodus was "in haste" but obviously slowed by elderly dependents. The Israelites had not an inkling of what lay ahead of them. The Exodus was to become the epic event that came to epitomize God's great salvation and deliverance from slavery and the greatest miracle in the natural order. God sent His wind that parted the mighty Sea in two, reminiscent of the wind that blew in the mulberry trees as a sign for David to engage in battle, the whirlwind that swept Elijah from earth to heaven and the wind of the Spirit that filled the upper room on the Day of

Pentecost. The Exodus became the focus for generations of Jews who remembered each year in the Passover meal the occasion when the destroying angel “passed over” Egypt and God delivered them by a mighty act of salvation from their enemies.

One cannot separate the “Exodus” from the great confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh that preceded their expulsion from Egypt. An essential part of this great epic narrative is the miracle of deliverance at the Red Sea followed by the gathering of the children of Israel at Sinai where the Lord entered into covenant with His people and gave to them the Law.

The atmosphere on that eventful night was not dissimilar to the atmosphere surrounding the “Last Supper” that Jesus had so desired to share with His disciples. Read Lk.22:14-30 in this light and read the events that followed swiftly in succession. Jesus teaches the significance of His death from the emblems of bread and wine. He then proceeds to tell them that there was a traitor in their midst! Alarm and fear possessed the vulnerable disciples, “Is it I?” is the question they each other. It is evident from Peter’s hasty and violent action in using his sword that they were tense with anxiety - and then they all ran away!

The teaching of Jesus is pivotal teaching for us. His body and His blood are given specific meaning by Him and point to His immanent sacrifice for sin. “*My body ... my blood.*” The significance of Jesus’ teaching waited the greater revelation that the Holy Spirit would impart to His apostles regarding the full content and meaning of salvation.

THE “BREAKING OF BREAD”

(1Cor.11:23-34)

Paul having received the account of the breaking of Bread from Jesus’ disciples faithfully passed it on to the church at Corinth (1Cor.11:22). Due to the excessive carnality of some rich members of the church a travesty ensued. They made it an occasion for indulgent feasting before poor brothers who were slaves who waited for the party to cease and the Breaking of Bread to begin. How different from the care that was shown to the poor of their company when the church began. Putting

aside for a moment the insensitivity and carnality of the rich in the church we learn unique lessons from Paul's account:

1. The meal is a memorial of the events of the cross, *"Do this in remembrance of Me"* (v24).
2. The Meal is a reminder of fundamental truth about the death of Jesus, teaching directly from Christ. The meal was also an affirmation of the cross, *"You do show the Lord's death till He come"* (v26 cf. Gal.3:1b).
3. The meal anticipates the return of Jesus, *"until He comes"* (v26). The intensity of longing is expressed in greeting one another with the Aramaic word *"Maranatha!"* (1Cor.16:22 cf. Rev.22:20).
4. The meal must be accompanied by self-examination – and not in haste. It seems that Paul has spent an abnormal length of time on this matter of self-examination, but I think it is due to the deep problems that we have already recognized in the church associated with the breaking of bread (vv27-32).
5. It is a time for waiting on each other, an occasion of loving reconciliation and renewing of covenant love. Paul says, *"Tarry one for another"* (v33). *Why is it that we rush this special time of memorial and this appointed time for waiting on one another?* The church needs occasions like this. Originally the breaking of bread took place in the home, in the house churches that were so conducive to intimacy. It was the occasion for the whole church fellowship to come together, for renewal and maintaining unity. The adoration of the Lamb and the exchanges of love in the body of Christ would often release spiritual gifts (1Cor.14:26) and be the occasion of healing (James 5:18).

This message was preached on Thursday 24th November at the Breaking of Bread Service at Allahabad Bible Seminary (ABS), India. Derrick Harrison 2011