

Maundy Thursday 2007

Earlier this evening we celebrated the Jewish Passover. Now we celebrate the Passover for Christians in the Last Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ. They go together if for no better reason than our Lord celebrated both meals on the night he was arrested. They go together because they both remember the Passover of our Lord uniting the Lord Jesus and his Passover on the cross for all men and the Passover of Yahweh saving his people Israel.

The Last Supper would retell the first Passover in Egypt some twelve centuries earlier as it had for generations. It was a celebration on the run. It was fast food for the children of God. This feast would be consumed by a nation of slaves destined to break free of its Egyptian yoke. In its wake, Israel would leave behind its bondage - to enter a New World. In its wake the people of Israel would leave behind death and destruction and welcome the Promised Land.

Every member of the Jewish faith re-lives that night each year for the rest of his/her life. For a Jew to forget this night would be to forget the cost of freedom from bondage and sin.

The signs of its freedom for all eternity would be a lamb slaughtered, roasted, and then eaten. The signs of its freedom would be the blood of that slaughtered lamb marking the doorway into each home. And they would remember most of all that they had taken with them much more than clothing, jewelry and gold of their enemy. Each family had taken with it, the greatest sign of all: its firstborn child.

The eating, the running, the bitter taste of slavery and death in their mouth during each year's Passover Seder Meal would help God's people to remember. Jesus wanted his disciples to cherish their faith origins before he died. He wanted them to link their past with the new Passover he would create.

Jesus took the Jewish Passover that Thursday night and reestablished it once again in the hearts of his disciples. On that night 1500 years after the first Passover celebration Jesus would become the lamb of sacrifice. He would not eat or drink of that sacrifice. He would wait. He would become that sacrifice and that lamb of the new Passover hung on a tree. Jesus would forever unite the sacrifice of a lamb with his own human life. By this act he would hope to eliminate the need of sacrifice of all living beings.

By his cross he would teach them of his love and demonstrate that love by another outward sign: water and the act of servant-hood.

This sign was one he hoped would be a continuous act of that sacrificial love demonstrated on the cross. The first act of love was once for all time instituted by the Passover supper. This last act of love after the Lord's Supper would be repeated for ever.

Taking water and washing each one of his disciples was an act of friendship, humility and love. It was not enough to break bread, eat and drink. The act of cleaning the soles of the feet of each disciple transformed that Passover. It was a self-less act of utter humility, self-emptying and pouring out of one's life for another.

Having loved his own, he loved them to the end. If any of us could be worthy of those words on our grave it would be a fitting tribute to our Savior. His beloved disciples would long remember after his death how the sacrifice of their Master Jesus transformed the one of the Exodus uniting both forever.

Looking back they would understand that God's broken lamb, his Son, in that last supper, would break the curse of death and its power to keep humanity in bondage. The lamb first offered in the Exodus would deliver God's people. Now the lamb of God would be the Son of God. Jesus was God's lamb whose sacrifice was modeled in the washing of feet. The washing of each other would be an act of love that his disciples could perform by faith. Though Jesus alone was to suffer death, Jesus love for them and the world would continue perpetually by such service. Their lord and teacher had done for them what they were to do for one another. They could not follow him to the cross of Calvary. The way of the cross was his to bear alone. Yet Jesus left behind a way we all can follow.

Would they remember the sign of that act of love? Will we? Would they live out the inward reality of such love long after their memories grew dim of his death? Will we?

Tonight with the ancient people of Israel and the ancient church we dare to remember. We call on one another to remember the outward signs of our faith and live out his love performed this night. Having loved his own, Jesus loved them and us to the end. Amen