

MY BODY, BROKEN---MY BLOOD, POURED OUT

by Doug Goins

Passover Week was a time of contrasts and contradictions for the disciples of Jesus. Six days before Passover, in Bethany, Jesus had allowed Mary to anoint him with expensive perfume, explaining that it was in anticipation of his burial. But the next day the disciples witnessed the spontaneous demonstration of worship and praise as Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem to shouts of

**"HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID;
BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!
EVEN THE KING OF ISRAEL!" (Matthew 21:9b, John 12:13c).**

For three days Jesus preached with power and acted with authority at the Temple, but the response of the people was not repentance but recalcitrance. His disciples saw that he approached the Passover observance--his first in Jerusalem in three years--with sorrow, not joy. He wept over Jerusalem, the city of David, and spent each night alone in Bethany in conversation with his Heavenly Father.

The disciples discerned in Jesus an increasingly focused sense of direction and purpose. They sensed the end of a journey which had begun some nine months earlier, with Jerusalem as its destination and Passover as its scheduled culmination. Passover Week was a time of emotional ups and downs to these twelve intimates of Jesus, especially Judas. Ten days before Passover, Judas had met with the Sanhedrin, the General Council, the high court of justice of the Jewish nation, to discuss his willingness to help in the arrest of Jesus. Judas offered to lead the authorities to Jesus at night so they could arrest him in secret. An agreement was reached and blood money was paid. It appears that Jesus spent the day before Passover alone, either in Bethany or in the hills. So Thursday, the day of Passover, dawned the first day of Unleavened Bread.

In chapter 14 of his gospel, beginning with verse 12, Mark records the careful preparation for that Passover observance:

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the householder, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." And the disciples set out and went to the city, and found it as he has told them; and they prepared the Passover.

Three times in that paragraph the word "prepare" is used. In verse 12, the word suggests the disciples' concern that the Passover meal, with all of its importance, be approached carefully and appropriately. In verse 15, the word reveals Jesus' own concern for thoughtful planning and attention to detail. Finally, in verse 16, we see the obedient response of the disciples as "they prepared the Passover." Just as they had learned during the three years they had been with him, the disciples now looked to Jesus for leadership. They had celebrated the feast with him in Galilee three times already, and here again they trust him for direction in planning their evening together around the Passover table.

Jesus is amazingly detailed in his instructions to them; obviously he has worked out all the arrangements in advance. In verse 13, Mark says he commissioned two of the twelve to begin the preparation process. Luke's gospel indicates that it was Peter and John who were sent into the city with a rather strange mission: they were to look for a man carrying a jug of water on his head. This man would have stood out in a crowd because men in that culture did not carry pots of water, that was women's work. They were to follow this man to a house that had been prepared for them by an unnamed disciple of Jesus who had agreed to open his home for their celebration of the Passover meal. The disciples were to ask this homeowner an identifying question: he would recognize who they were talking about when they referred to Jesus as "The Teacher." The room, which this hospitable disciple made available, was his unused guest room, an upper room--probably a rooftop structure with an outside stairway. Such rooms were common in Jerusalem, and were often made available for rent by homeowners in need of income.

Part of the readying process would have been the homeowner's ceremonial searching for leaven, or yeast, throughout his house (including the upper room), and banishing any found as a symbol of the need to excise any sin or corruption from his home in preparation for Passover. Peter and John were also to carry out specific responsibilities during this time of preparation. Verse 12 suggests they were responsible for sacrificing the Passover lamb. Early in the day they would have taken an unblemished lamb to the temple and sacrificed it. They would have watched the priest drain the blood of the lamb and throw it on the altar. Then they would have taken the carcass home to roast in preparation for the Passover meal.

In his commentary on this passage in the gospel of Mark, William Barclay says,

There were certain things which were necessary, and these are the things which the disciples would have to prepare and get ready.

(i) There was the lamb, and the lamb was to remind them of how their houses had been protected by the badge of blood when the Angel of Death passed through Egypt.

(ii) There was the unleavened bread which was to remind them of the bread they had eaten in haste when they escaped from slavery.

(iii) There was a bowl of salt water, to remind them of the tears they had shed in Egypt and of the waters of the Red Sea through which they had miraculously passed to safety.

(iv) There was a collection of bitter herbs--horse radish, chicory, endive, lettuce, horehound--to remind them of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt.

(v) There was a paste called *Charosheth*, which was a mixture of apples, dates, pomegranates and nuts, and which was to remind them of the clay of which they had made bricks in Egypt. Through it there were sticks of cinnamon to remind them of the straw with which the bricks had been made.

(vi) There were four cups of wine. The cups contained a little more than half a pint of wine, but three parts of wine were mixed with two of water. The four cups, which were drunk at different stages of the meal, were to remind them of the four promises in Exodus 6:6, 7,

"I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will rid you of their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm. I will take you to me for a people, and I will be your God."

Such were the preparations which had to be made for the Passover.

Verse 16 says that everything was ready, just like Jesus said it would be. Peter and John had fulfilled their assignment, first, out of respect for and appreciation of their own Jewish faith and tradition, their own understanding of God's salvation history in the life of his people: deliverance from bondage in Egypt, and continuing care and deliverance throughout all the years of history. But, secondly, they responded in obedience because they loved the Lord Jesus very deeply, and they sensed how much this particular evening meant to him.

As we gather around the table of the Lord this morning, preparation is important for us. We need to examine our lives for any leaven of sin, for any presumption or carelessness in our relationship to the Lord. We need to thoughtfully consider God's salvation history in our own lives. If preparation was important for Jesus and the twelve it is important for us as well. Partly out of that concern the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11 that we not eat and drink "in an unworthy manner."

Beginning with verse 17, Mark records the conversation around the Passover dinner table. It was conversation filled with love, representing the fellowship those thirteen men shared, but it also revealed betrayal:

And when it was evening he came with the twelve. And as they were at table eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread in the same dish with me. For the Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to the man by whom the son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

The evening spent in that anonymous upper room was as full of contrasting motives, agendas and emotions as the week preceding it had been. The fellowship around the table is only hinted at in Mark's account, but Luke tells us that Jesus set the tone for the evening, a tone of intensity, by telling his men that he had eagerly anticipated, he had earnestly desired this particular Passover observance.

Luke also records that an argument broke out among the disciples about who was going to sit where at the table, and about greatness in God's kingdom. Once again, as he had done so many times before, Jesus lovingly rebukes them and teaches them about servanthood as a lifestyle. John tells us in his gospel that Jesus demonstrated his own humility by washing their feet before the meal, saying to them, "Here am I among you like a servant" (John 13). So it was an evening of Jesus' loving ministry to his men, and his own teaching on love after the Passover meal, as John summarizes Jesus' upper room discourse. As a matter of fact we get the day "Maundy Thursday" in Easter week from the Latin word, "mandatum," which means, "command." This reminds us of Jesus' teaching in the upper room that Thursday night about his "new commandment" to his disciples that they "love one another as he had loved them."

But we learn in the latter half of verse 18 that there was a chilling interjection, as Jesus reveals traitorous intentions at the table. All three synoptic gospels record the words of Jesus in these four verses identically. Matthew, Mark and Luke recall other details of the evening differently, but the impact of this statement was so powerful that their recall of these chilling words of Jesus is in total agreement. One of the twelve would betray the Lord! It seemed impossible. Mark records that their immediate response was sorrow and grief. Matthew says

the sorrow was extreme, while Luke and John both declare that the twelve began to discuss this horrible prospect among themselves. But in all the discussion one thing they do not do is point the finger of accusation at one another. No, the question asked by each one of them is, "Surely, Lord, not I?"

Every one of us can identify with how these men felt. There is something evil in us, something we don't trust, something that may break out in a shameful, traitorous act against our Lord. These men were gripped by that fearful possibility, that self-doubt.

Jesus goes on to say that he will be betrayed by a friend. When the four gospel accounts of the evening are harmonized, it is clear that the disciples lay on low couches all around the table, and that John and Judas lay on either side of Jesus. Thus they would have dipped into the same bowl as he throughout the meal. So what Jesus tells the twelve, in essence, is that it is one of the two who are dipping into the same bowl with him who will betray him.

Matthew records that Judas asks the Lord if he is the one, and Jesus confirms his traitorous role. But Jesus goes on to say that Judas' act, his responsibility, is part of prophetic fulfillment--"As it is written of Him, the Son of man." Here Jesus alludes to Psalm 41:9: "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." Jesus understands Judas' terrible role in accomplishing God's redemptive plan for mankind; he sees God's divine economy at work. As a matter of fact, the apostle Peter will later proclaim, in his sermon at Pentecost, that Jesus was "delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Jesus understands the plan, of which Judas is a part.

But Jesus goes on to say, in the second half of verse 21, that there are terrible consequences for Judas' choice: "woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." What awful words of judgment and condemnation! Judas still remains totally accountable for his moral choice. Jesus' deliverance to death is part of God's plan, but that does not remove responsibility from the human heart. I believe Jesus is making one last loving appeal to Judas: "I know what you're going to do. Won't you stop now, before it's too late?" He gives him a final warning of consequences. But, there is no compulsion. Jesus could have stopped Judas--one word to the disciples and Judas never would have left the room alive.

Here, in a moment, is our whole human condition: God gives us free will, his love appeals to us, his truth warns us, but there is no coercion or manipulation. The awful nature of our freedom, our spine-tingling freedom, is such that we can refuse God's love and disregard his warning, but in the end we stand fully responsible for our sin.

John adds that Jesus quietly asked Judas to leave and fulfill his tragic mission quickly.

As we gather around our Lord's table this morning we need to ask ourselves whether this meal will be one of loving intimacy and fellowship with the Lord, or will our own traitorous hearts betray us. Will we feel the security and joy of a family gathering, or the alienation and estrangement of a prodigal?

Beginning with verse 22, Mark introduces these beautiful, powerful, simple symbols of salvation:

And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many."

Luke's account of these words adds the command from the Lord Jesus, when he gave the unleavened bread, "This do in remembrance of me." The apostle Paul, under the direct revelation of Jesus, adds the same words to the institution of the cup, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

"In remembrance": calling to memory, remembering. My wife, Candy, and I have done a good bit of remembering this past month since her father, Reverend Ted Lyons, went home to be with the Lord on October 2nd. We spent a lot of time talking about his life and his life with us, a lot of wonderful remembering.

Frederick Buechner, in his tremendous book on the life of Christ, *The Magnificent Defeat* (a great title for a book about Jesus), has this to say about remembering:

It is not unusual when a person dies for the people who knew him best and loved him most to try to remember the last time that they ever saw him or the last time, like Christmas for instance, or somebody's birthday, or a picnic on the beach, when they all came together, perhaps ate together, when they all were together in the special way that people who love each other are at some special moment like that. And then, as time goes by and Christmas comes round again, or that birthday, or another picnic on the same beach, the person who has since died is apt to be very much on the minds of the people who are there. They may never actually mention his name for fear of seeming sentimental or of upsetting the others or perhaps just from fear of upsetting themselves, but that does not greatly matter. Because the air rings loud, of course, with the name that they do not mention, and in a unique sense he is with them there, the absent one. He is there at least as a memory, at least as a lump in the throat, but

maybe as much more than that. He may be there as a presence, a benediction, a terrible reproach, or possibly as all of these at once.

It is with something like this, I think, that you have to start if you try to understand why it is that in all of its long history and in most of its many branches, the Christian faith has made so much of the Last Supper.

We remember that Jesus took two physical elements from the Passover meal--the unleavened bread and the cup of thanksgiving--and made them his own, focusing clearly on the real purpose of this meal he had arranged. He broke the bread and offered it to the disciples as symbolizing his own body "given for you." He offered the wine as a symbol of his own "blood of the new covenant," poured out for them individually, and for all humanity, "for the remission of sins."

In the 2,000 years since that night, the church has developed much eucharistic theology, but my concern this morning is what those words and what that action meant to the twelve gathered around the table with Jesus. First, and unmistakably, it put an end to any hope they may still have been clinging to that Jesus did not really mean what he said about coming to Jerusalem to die. He was symbolically enacting his death, which he knew was only hours away.

But his words and his action also explained why his death was necessary. His body "given for you," and his blood "poured out for many" point to the redemptive purpose of Jesus' death, of which he had already begun to teach them. And the words that Matthew adds, "for the forgiveness of sins," make the point more explicit: he was not dying for a cause, he was dying for people, as the only sacrifice which could bring them back to God. At Passover time they could not miss that point. The Passover meal was a reminder of how God's people were rescued by the blood of the first Passover lambs. That rescue had been the beginning of Israel as a nation, when they came together at Sinai and accepted God's covenant. Now Jesus' blood is "blood of the covenant," the new covenant, as established by his sacrifice. From this night on it is Jesus, the final, perfect sacrifice, who is the foundation of the true people of God.

They were to continue to perform this deeply significant act in memory of him, Jesus directed. The yearly reminder of the first Passover was to be transcended by the regular enactment of this simple visual aid to remind them of the greater Passover, when he died for the sins of many and the new covenant was established. Simple, yes, but revolutionary in its symbolism: symbols of a voluntary choice to die--symbols of a necessary death if the world was to be saved from the very evil that was trying to destroy Jesus; symbols of a life given away for the sake of the world--symbols of salvation.

Frederick Buechner has this to say about the place of symbolism at the Lord's table.

The mystery of symbols is that a symbol contains some of the power of the thing that it symbolizes. A piece of colored cloth, a flag, for instance, has the power to move men to the same kind of fervor and action that the nation itself can. Or if we hear somebody's name--which is a symbol for the person himself--it has the power to make our hearts beat faster or strike fear in our souls, which is part of the power that the person has. As for the symbols of the Last Supper--extraordinary power is there. Extraordinary because they represent power that does not simply make the heart beat faster, say, but power that can transform a human life into a new kind of life altogether--a life like that of Jesus, with his power in it.

As we gather around our Lord's table this morning, what is our remembrance? Have we experienced the power of his life and death and resurrection in our own lives? Are we children of the new covenant? Is Jesus, in our memory, a living "presence, a benediction, or a terrible reproach?" If you have not yet personally accepted his loving, voluntary sacrifice on your behalf, what better time to surrender yourself to him. Right now, as we come to the table, silently, in the privacy of your own thoughts you can respond to his life-giving death and enter into the new arrangement of living before God, cleansed of sin and confident that Christ will live out his life in you. Respond by faith to the Lord Jesus.

Mark closes his account with a final word that speaks hope out of the depths of sorrow. Verse 25:

"Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

What a great word of anticipation! Death to most people is final. It would be only natural if the disciples, engrossed by the now inescapable thought that Jesus was about to die, could see little immediate grounds for hope. But Jesus is already looking beyond the next 24 hours of suffering--beyond the arrest, the humiliating trial, the crucifixion, with its abandonment and loneliness--to the resurrection, the ascension into heaven, and his glorification at the right hand of the Father. They would eat and drink together again on "that day" in the Kingdom of God. What was about to happen was not the end, but a new beginning. The Kingdom of God was becoming a reality. The future was not a funeral, but a feast!

This morning, as we gather around our Lord's table, we can have the same sense of anticipation, the same hopeful orientation to that coming consummation--that "blessed hope"--as we celebrate the meal together now, and every time we celebrate his body broken, and his blood poured out--every time "until he comes."

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

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