

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Passover | Exodus 12**

So this is what we would like to focus on during Lent; a symbol for what we're hungry for—whether we are parched, or starving, or full and need to share [holds up a wooden bowl]. I'd like to ask you to take out a pew Bible if you would please. Turn to the 12th chapter of Exodus, that's near the beginning. In the pew Bibles Exodus is around page 97. I'm going to ask you to underline some things there so if there's a pencil around you, you can use it as well. While you're turning, I'll tell you that this is a description of a meal in the Bible. We're going to talk about a different meal every week—Taste and See—and we thought we would start with the meal that's found in Exodus 12, but that's in part because I wanted to start with a “Winner, winner, chicken dinner.” I wanted to make sure it was a good meal, so think of a great meal that you've had—one of the best, most memorable meals you've ever had, whether it was because of the company, or the setting, or the food—can you think of a great meal? I asked some of my friends. One of them just couldn't stop talking about it. He said that he had been invited to the White House and that he could barely remember what he ate because the President talked to him that day and the Queen of England was in the room. Another person talked about being in Washington D.C., but she said, “I went to 5 Guys (Burger and Fries) and I was just about to put in my order when somebody taped me on the shoulder. I turned around and it was the President of the United States, eating at 5 Guys!” She'll never forget that meal. For most of us it's not something that highlights, it's more who we're with that makes it. You know, the classic Thanksgiving or reunion meal that's filled with people that we love and foods that we love—before crazy Uncle Louis starts yelling at people about politics. It's a wonderful time that we have that we can't wait to get back to. For others of you it might be a special occasion, a holiday or a special event like a wedding, and your memories of that wedding just change everything—you love it. For me, the most significant one that I remembered this week happened to a friend of mine that I met in Washington D.C. His name is Mike and he said the best meal that he could remember he had on Christmas Eve. He had just turned 19 earlier that month, and what made this Christmas Eve unusual was that he was spending it in a submarine under the North Pole about 500 feet below the ice. They were going to be there for another month, but because it was going to be Christmas Eve, the captain had ordered a special meal. He said he was cramped together with all these guys and on Christmas Eve he could smell the turkey all day as it cooked inside the submarine. The captain had arranged for one long, long table to go all the way up and down the submarine, and when they sat down to eat, he said, “Down at the other end, somebody from the engine room started to sing a Christmas carol and all these rowdy, profane, smoking, Navy guys started to sing Christmas carols.” He said, “I'm 19-years-old and I thought, maybe there is a God. Maybe there is a God”, and he'll never forget that meal.

Raise your hand if you thought of a meal, a special meal. Anybody thought of a good

meal? Good for you. I'm not going to ask you, but good for you. We'll hope that the rest of you have a chance to go back to that meal—the feel of that meal, the smell of that meal. Laura was saying this afternoon that sometimes the most powerful part of a meal is the smell—you know, the smell of bread baking or, for me, the smell of bacon just about anywhere. We want to get back to this. In weeks to follow we're going to talk about awkward meals or really bad meals where you're afraid to go back there, but today I want to talk about the granddaddy of all the meals in the Bible.

This part of the story takes place when the Jews had been made slaves in Egypt. God sent Moses and his sidekick Aaron to get the Jews out. The plagues have come, but they haven't convinced Pharaoh yet. That's the story up to Exodus 11. All those terrible things have happened and it says the Pharaoh's heart was hard. The Pharaoh spoke to Moses and Aaron and he said,

² “Who is your God, that I should obey Him?” [Exodus 5:2]

Who is your God? What makes your God unique? And that's the question that the rest of the Bible will try to answer . . . what makes your God unique? And a big part of the answer is found in the meal that we call the Passover. The Passover is central to the DNA of both Christians and Jews. It's a meal that marks the bloody death of a helpless victim to rescue other people. At the center of the Christian and Jewish faith is the bloody death of a helpless victim to rescue other people. Let's see how that first meal is described.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ² “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³ Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family [if you've got your pencils underline that one], one for each household. ⁴ If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they have to share with their nearest neighbor. ⁵ The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶ Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter all of these animals at twilight. ⁷ Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. ⁸ That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast [that's what unleavened bread is]. ¹⁰ Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹ This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover. ¹² On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. [Pharaoh has asked, “Who is your God that we should obey Him?” “I am.” Remember, “Who are you?” Moses asked. “I am. I am the Lord.”] ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch

you when I strike Egypt. ¹⁴ This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate this as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance.” [Exodus 12:2-14]

Now, I'd like you to leave that open and if you haven't had a chance, underline those four verses because I want the next people who open it to see that you actually read it. You want to underline in verse 3, "Take a lamb, one for each household." In verse 7, "Take some of the blood. Put it on the sides and tops of the door frames where they eat the lambs." Verse 11, "This is how you should eat. Cloak tucked in, sandals on your feet, staff in your hand." And then in verse 13, "When I see the blood I will pass over."

The Passover talks about a law of the universe. I believe that one of the laws of the universe is that when we violate the design that God has for our lives, we unleash forces of chaos and destruction, of disintegration, and it happens inside of us, and between us, and in our families, in our culture, and in our world. You can see it every day, this sense of violating God's design and that goes on and on and on, but Passover marks a time where God seems to fast forward to the judgment day. Fast-forward to what judgment day might look like. In one night, one place, eternal and divine judgment comes down to the earth. It's preliminary, it's temporary, but it is judgment of life and death, and it happened then and it happened there.

Now, I think part of the judgment of God was just an accounting for the evil that had happened. I think another part of that judgment day was literally (I'm not being profane), to scare the hell out of Pharaoh, but it brought finality to what makes your God unique. Now, when He talks about the judgment that's to come, not in this passage, but in chapter 23, God tells Moses that for all the houses that have blood on them, the destroyer will come to the house, but not enter in. The destroyer is the name that's given to the angel of judgment or the agent of judgment that God uses to destroy much of Egypt. And in the face of an inexorable, irresistible, unstoppable destroyer from God, who goes through the mightiest empire like a knife through hot butter in one night, the only hope that God offers His people is that they will be protected by a sheep. Remember the childhood rhyme "Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb"? Moses had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb. Can you imagine how Moses felt telling the first hundred people what the plan was? "Okay, now you kill the lamb and then you put it's blood on the door and then the angel of death won't come in." "Could you say that one more time? Because I thought you said that the lamb was going to stop something that's going to kill the rest of the world." This is a story that confuses and confounds, and for modern people, often offends us as modernists because we don't understand the context of that world.

Let me take a couple minutes and see if I can show you why the idea of putting the blood of a lamb on the doorstep was a sign of the power of God versus the powers of

the world. This is not the only time that we hear about a lamb being used in the Bible. It's a story that really goes all the way through the Bible. There's a theologian who says that a lamb is the story of the Bible. The first time the lamb appears is in the story of Cain and Abel (Adam and Eve's kids). Abel gives a good sacrifice because he sacrifices a lamb. Cain gives a bad sacrifice. Fast forward to the story of Abraham. He finally has a little boy named Isaac and one day God says, "Abraham, I want you to take your son, your only son, and sacrifice him to Me on the mountain." So, Abraham takes his son Isaac, puts wood on his son's shoulders, takes a knife and puts fire in his hand and climbs the mountain. Halfway up the mountain the little boy says, "Hey dad, I don't see the lamb for the sacrifice. Where's the lamb?" And the best that Abraham can do is say, "God will provide the lamb", knowing that Isaac is to be the sacrifice. Fast-forward again to the time of King David. Nathan the prophet sees that King David has gotten away with rape, with deception, with murder, and now is pretending like he's a good guy because he has brought the murdered man's widow into his household and is taking care of her. What's the story that Nathan tells? He says, "King, let me tell you a story. There were two men. The one had nothing except one little lamb and the other had thousands of sheep. The rich man had a neighbor come over for dinner and he wanted to impress him, so instead of using one of his own lambs, he took the poor guy's only lamb and killed it." And David is incensed because the lamb is a sign. Fast-forward to Isaiah the prophet. Isaiah says that the Messiah will come and on that day He will be led to the slaughter like a lamb. John the Baptist sees Jesus for the first time and he says, "Behold the lamb of God." The Bible's story ends in another garden where the cry goes out, "Behold the lamb upon the throne."

All throughout the Bible the lamb is there. It's precious. It's a symbol of something costly. It's pure; it's a sign of something without fault, and it's essentially weak. Nobody says, "Go get em, sheep," or "We're the fighting lambs." No. The lamb represents a meek and mild contrast to the powers of the earth. The signs go on and in the story of the lamb in the Bible, the lamb is needed. The lamb is sacrificed deliberately. The lamb rescues. The lamb dies so that others do not have to die. We are told to trust, not in power, but in the God who gives us sheep and says, "Go this way."

So that's the key thought behind why the first meal that we offer is the Passover. The Passover meal has at its core the salvation of God. That's important. Not the salvation by any hero—Moses is not the hero—the salvation of God. Only those marked by the blood of the lamb will be saved. Hold on to that image for a minute. The other thing I wanted you to circle in the text in this part of the story is down in verse 11 because it describes the posture of the people who first celebrated Passover and how that changed over time. It says:

"This is how you are to eat it. Eat the meal with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover. On that same night I will pass through Egypt."

And then, what happens next? Well, then God kills all the first-born animals and all the first-born people in Egypt. The Jews go from being slaves to conquering heroes. They stay in Egypt, they set up a new kingdom, the story is . . . No! No, what happens is that the Jews leave Egypt and they head toward another land. They head toward a land that is promised to them. The temptation for the Jews who grew up in Egypt was to stay because it was finally safe, and to flourish where they had been slaves. The temptation to stay in the land of Egypt was strong back then and here and now.

That's the other lesson that I picked up this week—that when we eat the Passover feast we're not supposed to sit around, have a great time, and then go back to business as usual—we're supposed to get up and go.

Laura and I have had the privilege of leading a couple of trips to Israel and one of our good friends has been a great guide. He knows all about Jewish culture and he says that in the secular state of Israel, the holidays are dotted throughout the year and they always mark a great event in the life of the Bible, but it doesn't really matter to most of the secular Jews, they just know they have a day off. As a matter of fact, one of the sayings there is "They're all the same. All of the holidays are the same." The Jews say, "They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat." "They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat." And what they need is help in stopping to hear the story, to be reminded how hard it is to leave when you're comfortable. How easy it is to stay in Egypt with other gods. That's why when this was brought into the story of the Jesus followers, the story of the Passover was always most powerful with the slaves, the poor, the sick, and the dying, because they saw that the Passover led to the great journey, instead of thinking that was as good as it gets. When Passover degenerates into a day off, it loses its power, and the Christianization of the Passover meal is right here in Communion. For many of you, Communion has become "are we doing this the short way or the long way today?" "Is this seven minutes or is it going to be eleven minutes long?" Well, the cure for the Jews was to take the time to change their posture, so when the Passover is celebrated well, people have to take off their shoes, they have to tuck in, they have to plan that they're leaving, they leave doors open to say we're on the road. Instead of saying, "They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat", they start to say to each other, "This is not my home. I'm an alien passing through this land." "This is not my home. I'm an alien passing through this land." They try to teach that to each other on the Passover so that it will apply the next day. So that when you're stuck in one of these stupid partisan bickering political fights that seem to suck us all out of joint, at one point you may pull back and say, *you know, as important as this is, this is not my home. I'm an alien passing through this land.* When you're criticized this week for trying your very best and you feel like you're a loser, you need to be reminded of this night where someone said to you, "This is not my home. I'm an alien passing through this land." When you're tempted this week to purchase something that will help you feel better but you don't need, you need to say to yourself, "This is not my home. I'm an alien passing through

this land.” When you’re driving some place and all of a sudden police sirens and lights come on behind you, you to pull over. When the officer comes up to the car, roll down the window and say, “Officer, this is not my home. I’m an alien passing through this land.” See if it works. We need help remembering where we are and where we’re going, and those of us who have been inflicted with great comfort find it hard to leave Pharaoh’s court. We need help remembering.

So, as I retell the Passover story, are you hungry today? Are you hungry for certainty about where you stand with God? Pharaoh’s question . . . what makes your God so special? Do you wonder whether you’re good enough? Are you trying hard enough? Are you religious enough? Are you giving enough? Have you decided how you would answer if tonight you had to face the judgment of God? That’s what Passover is about. Have you decided how you would answer tonight if you had to face the judgment of God?

In the rest of our time together, I’d like to make this visual so you will remember. We said this was going to be the symbol of our Lent and we wanted to make it more than just a symbol; we wanted to make it so that you could take it home with you. So, in each of the pews there should be a card. On one side of the card is the story of how this bowl—and how all of these 1,500 bowls—were made. They were made by artisans in Nicaragua through our support of Opportunity International and they are here as gifts to us, to taste and see. When you come up for Communion today, we will ask each household here, single or married, to take one of these bowls. We’re asking each one of you to take one home. On the other side of this card there is a connection to the passage we are studying each week. So, this week we want to ask you: What are you hungry for? What has the Passover said to you? What would you say to the judgment of God?

Next week we’re going to tell about somebody who doesn’t have enough to eat and ask you to fast that following Monday—to not eat lunch that day. We hope all of us won’t eat lunch that Monday and we’ll try to answer the questions on this card. We’ll alternate fasting one week and feasting the next. Fasting one week and feasting the next week, letting God speak to us throughout our week, at least once a week for the next seven.

Now, I know that you all, if you’ve been in church before, know that the roots of what we call the Lord’s Supper, or Communion, or the Lord’s Table, are found in the Passover meal. Jesus is going to have the Passover with his disciple friends, but I feel like it’s lost a lot of its juice. The roots may be in the Passover, but I feel like I often live as if the Gospel has been reduced to this one phrase: Jesus died for me, I’m forgiven, let’s move on. That’s the story. Jesus died for me, I’m forgiven, let’s move on, and what happens when I just take Communion as Jesus died for me, I’m forgiven, let’s move on, over and over, what happens is that I hear the echo of another phrase. What happens is that

Jesus died for me, I'm forgiven, let's move on starts to sound a lot like, "They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat." We need to recast what this meal first meant when we celebrate the Passover, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. We get our first hint when we see the person who recognizes Jesus first. It's John the Baptist. He says, "Behold the lamb of God." Jesus has become the Lamb of God. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The Passover said to the Jews, "You cannot save yourself. Egypt is too strong. Only God can save you." The Lord's Supper says, "You cannot make it right. Forgiveness must come *to* us, not *from* us." It is not by working harder or being religious, or by feeling sorry—I'll do better—that we become right with God. We become right with God by putting our trust in Jesus, the Lamb of God.

In the Book of Matthew Jesus says, *I so much want to eat this pascal lamb, the Passover lamb. I so much want to eat the lamb with you before I suffer because I'm telling you I won't eat it again until the kingdom of God.* That apparently means that He didn't have the lamb; there's no lamb on the Passover table with the disciples. There's no lamb *on* the table because the Lamb is *at* the table. There are no bitter herbs eaten because Jesus is going to experience bitterness in just hours in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Abraham took his only son up the mountain, he answered the question "where's the lamb?" by saying *God will provide a lamb*, and God did. But on this night, God says to us that He took His son, His only son, up the mountain too. He put wood on Jesus' shoulders and when He got halfway up the mountain, Jesus said, "Lord, if there's another way to do this...I'd really like to not do this." God said, "It's You", and so that Son, that Lamb, went and died. So, tonight after hearing about the Passover, after meeting the Lamb of God in a fresh way, are you tired of trying to be good enough? Are you tired of do-overs? Are you afraid of what God would think of you, what others would think of you if they really knew? I mean, if they really knew who you were? Are you not smart enough to figure all this stuff out? Well, then maybe you need to hear the voice of Jesus who says to me and says to you, "Come to Me. Come to Me, all you who are weary and you and I together eat the body of the Lamb." We are marked again by the blood of the Lamb and we are on the road. We're not staying at home; we're on the road. That's where this comes full circle back to the Kid's Sermon. Laura's Kid's Sermon used that phrase "taste and see that the Lord is good" and when we come to this table, the juice is no longer bitter, the Lamb has been turned into the bread of life, and each week we are called to taste and see that the Lord is good. Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, on that night, that Passover night, you turned to the people that You loved and said, "This is My body broken for you. Take it. Eat it." He poured wine into the cup and held it up and said, "This is the blood of the new covenant that will forgive you." The Lamb was about to be killed again, so Lord Jesus, tonight we come from wherever we have been rushing, and we ask You to mark us with the blood of Your love, to forgive us, to feed our souls so that we will not

stay in Egypt. Just as we marked our foreheads with ashes this Wednesday, we asked to mark us as followers of the one true King. Bless this meal in Your great name. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.