

Exodus 12 (v5-11) ⁵Your lamb must be unblemished, a year-old male. You may take it from the sheep or the goats. ⁶You are to keep it until the fourteenth day of this month. Then the whole assembly of the Israelite community is to slaughter the lambs at sunset. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses where they eat the lamb. ⁸That night they shall eat the meat that has been roasted over a fire, along with unleavened bread. They shall eat it with bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over a fire—with its head, its legs, and its internal organs. ¹⁰You shall not leave any of it until the morning. Whatever remains until the morning, you shall burn in the fire. ¹¹This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt ready for travel, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover.

I remember hearing someone say at one time something to the effect of, "We should only read and preach from the New Testament because it tells us all about Jesus and what he has done for us." I don't remember who said it but if memory serves, they should have known better. Now, I will never argue that we shouldn't talk about Jesus. If Jesus isn't in one of my sermons, I haven't done my job.

But that comment shows a fundamental misunderstanding about the Bible in general and the Old Testament in particular. The New Testament is not the only place that talks about Jesus. He is on every page of the Bible regardless of what Testament you are reading. The Old Testament is all about the Savior whom God promised and the New Testament is all about the Savior whom God sent.

So I think it is very fitting that this series that we are using for our mid-week Lenten services goes back to the Old Testament and looks at the pictures that God gave so that we can look at the New Testament and see how they were fulfilled. By doing that we will be absolutely convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the only Savior that we need. Tonight we are looking at the picture of a Lamb.

I want to go back roughly four centuries before the events of this text took place. Don't worry, this little trip will be worth it and will explain a lot. Ten of Jacob's twelve sons had done something really awful. They were jealous of their younger half-brother, Joseph, who seemed to be Daddy's favorite. So they sold him into slavery. Then they dipped his cloak in blood and took it back to their father, claiming that he must have been torn apart by wild animals. And you thought your siblings were mean to you!

Joseph was eventually taken to Egypt as a slave. His master's wife lied about him and as a result he was thrown into prison where he remained for a long time. To make a very long story short, God gave Joseph the ability to interpret Pharaoh's dream. There would be seven years of amazing harvests followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt to prepare the country for that.

In the first lesson for the seventh Sunday after the Epiphany we read about how Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food. Joseph forgave them because he saw God's plan behind everything. He invited them and his father to come live in Egypt so that they would be kept safe from the famine. God provided for his people! After many years passed, a Pharaoh came along who didn't trust the Israelites. He was afraid that if there was a war they would join his enemies so he made them all into slaves.

So then we get to the book of Exodus. That word literally means "the way out." It is all about how God brought his people out of their slavery in Egypt to bring them to the land that he had promised to give to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There was just one small problem. The Pharaoh didn't want to lose all this free labor. So God was going to give him no choice.

In the beginning of Exodus we meet Moses, an Israelite who was raised by Pharaoh's daughter as if he was a member of the royal family. He got the best education available in the world at that time. Eventually, God spoke to him from the burning bush. He was the one who would lead his people out of Egypt. After Moses whined and complained for a bit, God eventually convinced him to go.

Since Pharaoh wasn't about to listen to Moses, God was going to make him listen. That came in the form of the ten devastating plagues that he sent against them. The Egyptians would also notice that while those plagues affected them the Israelites were spared. You couldn't explain this away as one natural disaster after another. It became clear that this was by the hand of God.

The first nine plagues were: the Nile turning to blood, followed by plagues of frogs, lice, flies, death of livestock, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness. One key feature of all of those plagues is that they were directed against the gods of the Egyptians, showing how powerless they were against the true God. The Nile river was worshiped as a god. It turned to blood. Ra was the sun god. Everything turned pitch black. Pharaoh himself was worshiped as a god and, well, we'll see what happened to him.

God was going to send the final plague against the Egyptians. Then Pharaoh would have no choice but to let his people go. So God prepared the people to leave. This day would be remembered for years to come, so

much so that God changed their calendar so that this month became the first one of the year. That month is called Nisan and it covers roughly the end of March through most of April.

God wanted them to have a special sacrifice to commemorate this day. It is the holiest day on the Jewish calendar: Passover. God gave them specific instructions, “**5Your lamb must be unblemished, a year-old male. You may take it from the sheep or the goats. 6You are to keep it until the fourteenth day of this month. Then the whole assembly of the Israelite community is to slaughter the lambs at sunset.**”

The Passover wasn’t just to remember God rescuing his people out of Egypt. It served a far greater purpose. It was also pointing ahead to the Savior. The lamb was supposed to be without blemish, in other words, it didn’t have any weird discoloration or injury. In the same way the apostle Peter wrote, “**you were redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot.**”

At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry when John the Baptist pointed to him he said, “**Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**” Any faithful Israelite would immediately have known what John was talking about. He pointed to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Passover celebration. After so many years of planning and promising, God now was going to be fulfilling it all.

That lamb was to be sacrificed on the 14th day of the month. In the same way, Jesus, the Lamb of God, would be offered as a sacrifice too. Paul told the Ephesians, “**And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**” He told the Corinthians, “**For our Passover lamb has been sacrificed, namely, Christ!**”

There was one other minor detail which was still pointing ahead to Jesus. God told them when they ate the Passover lamb, “**Do not break any of its bones.**” That must’ve seemed like an odd thing to add, but it was teaching them something. The Apostle John wrote about Good Friday, “**But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs...Indeed, these things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, ‘Not one of his bones will be broken.’**”

This was not going to be a normal meal for the Israelites by any means. It would not be a casual dining experience. They were supposed to be packed and ready to travel because that night they would all be leaving Egypt. They were supposed to get rid of all the yeast in their homes. So often the Bible uses that as a picture of sin. So the bread they would eat would be unleavened, that is, without yeast. They also were to eat it with some bitter herbs to remind them of their many years of slavery.

Getting rid of all the yeast would be almost impossible, especially since microscopes wouldn’t come along for a few thousand years. So they would get rid of what they could and then disavow the rest of it. What a clear picture of how sin corrupts us so much that we can’t get rid of it on our own, no matter how hard we try. Since we are born slaves to sin, our lives are bitter too. We need freedom that only Christ can give.

God wanted to teach his Old Testament people that lesson too. So he had them do something very unusual. After they sacrificed that lamb, they were to take some of its blood and smear it on their door frames. God told them, “**The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are. When I see the blood, I will pass over you.**” That’s where the term “Passover” comes from. That night, the firstborn males of humans and animals throughout the land would die. But if the blood was there, they would be spared.

Commenting on the Old Testament sacrifices, the writer to the Hebrew Christians wrote, “**And nearly everything is cleansed with blood according to the law. And, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.**” There is only one way for there to be forgiveness for us and that is through Jesus blood. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “**In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace.**”

Jesus’ sacrifice is far greater than the Passover lamb. The firstborn males among the Israelites were spared because of that blood on their door frames. Jesus’ blood sets everyone free from sin. Even though we are all going to die unless he returns first, death has lost all meaning for us. It is no longer the ultimate punishment for sin. It is now the way that God takes us to our real, lasting home in heaven.

We might not think of it this way, but there is even a connection between the Passover and Holy Communion. Jesus instituted Holy Communion while he was eating the Passover meal with his disciples. Only he realized at that time that they were bringing the Passover to its fulfillment. So he took items that were a part of that meal, the unleavened bread and the cup of wine, and used them to institute something brand new for his New Testament church.

Both the Passover and Communion are memorial feasts. The Passover reminded the people of God’s grace in rescuing them from slavery in Egypt. In the words of institution for Holy Communion Jesus adds, “**Do this in remembrance of me.**” Every time we receive the sacrament we remember Jesus’ death on the cross for

us. In the new hymnal after the distribution is over I say, “Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,” and the congregation responds, “We proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

Both Passover and Communion both exclude people who do not know or understand God’s plan. God said, “**This is the regulation concerning the Passover: No foreigner may eat it.**” The Apostle Paul wrote about Holy Communion, “**Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Lord’s body and blood.**”

Of course, people would not necessarily be barred from it forever. God said in Exodus, “**But any slave whom you have purchased may eat it if you circumcise him.**” Even if a foreigner came to believe in the true God he could partake of the Passover. In the same way, if someone comes to know and believe what the Bible says and becomes a member of this church they are more than welcome to join us for Communion. Paul wrote, “**Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.**”

This year it works out that Holy Week and the Passover will occur on the same week. Passover runs from sundown on April 12 through sunrise on April 20, which is also Easter Sunday. The Jewish religious leaders did not want Jesus to die during that festival, but God had other plans. Passover pointed ahead to Jesus so Jesus would fulfill it at that time. God’s promises come true for his people of all time.

Martin Luther tied the two together so beautifully in his hymn Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands, “Here the true Paschal [that is, Passover] Lamb we see, whom God so freely gave us; he died on the accursed tree—so strong his love—to save us. See, his blood now marks our door; faith points to it; death passes o’er, and Satan cannot harm us. Alleluia!”

It is my prayer that through this Lenten series we will be able to see the value of looking at the Old Testament pictures of our Savior to lead us to an even greater appreciation of the New Testament reality. God had these things recorded for us so that we can grow in our knowledge of his eternal love for the whole world. To that end may God bless us.