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JESUS: GOD'S POWER IN ACTION

Jesus Gives Passover New Meaning

Bible School Lesson for April 13*

By Walter D. Zorn

The events surrounding the “last supper” Jesus had with His twelve disciples are filled with irony, tension, and pathos of the deepest kind. Two days before the Passover the Sanhedrin was looking for a way to arrest and kill Jesus (Mark 14:1, 2). They found it in Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve (Mark 14:10, 11). As with many betrayers, Judas needed money—money to replace what he had stolen out of the treasury of the twelve (John 12:6).

Mark reveals the irony of this story of betrayal by sandwiching it within the story of the anointing of Jesus by a woman (Mary; see John 12:3) at Simon’s house in Bethany (Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). This woman was rebuked harshly by the twelve, for the perfume was worth a year’s wages. Jesus said, “She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial” (Mark 14:8).*

In irony typical of Mark, one person (a woman) “wastes” money on Jesus in preparation for His burial while the other (a man) wants money in preparation for His arrest and killing, i.e., His burial. One, a forgiven sinner, shows appreciation; the other, an unforgiven thief, demonstrates avarice.

Setting the Table

The tension in this story leads up to a last supper narrative that is full of drama. First, the reader is confronted by the clandestine way in which the upper room had to be prepared (Mark 14:12-16). Note the details: a man carrying a jar of water (unusual in that culture), the omission of names other than “the Teacher” (a secret term), and finally a large upper room already furnished and ready for the finishing

touches by the disciples themselves!

The drama continues as Jesus reveals during the supper that one of the twelve will betray Him (Mark 14:17-21). The fact that Judas could say with the others, “Lord, is it I?” betrays his hypocrisy. As if that is not enough, sometime during the supper, “a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest” (Luke 22:24). At this point (John 13:2-5) Jesus began to wash the filthy feet of quarreling men. By example Jesus taught them how to be true servant leaders!

However, the deepest pathos is yet to be seen in this story, as Jesus gives the Passover new meaning (Mark 14:22-25).

My Body

The story of Passover is initially told in Exodus 12. The lamb for each family or group was selected on the 10th day of the first month. (Jesus’ triumphal entry was the day the people in Jerusalem selected their lambs!) Subsequently, on the 14th day the lamb was sacrificed, and some of its blood was to be placed on the door frames in order to protect that door! Without that protection (“protection” is a more accurate translation of the Hebrew word rendered “Passover”) every firstborn would die! Bitter herbs and

bread without yeast were to be eaten with the roasted lamb. The bones of the lamb were not to be broken (Exodus 12:46; compare John 19:36). On that first night they were to eat in haste, with cloaks tucked in and sandals on their feet and staffs in hand ready to go. Emphasis was placed upon the unleavened bread (Exodus 12:14-20; 13:6-10), for it represented the haste of the exodus events, especially how God miraculously deliv-

Home Daily Bible Readings

- April 7Mark 14:1-9
- April 8.....Mark 14:10-16
- April 9Mark 14:17-25
- April 10.....John 13:1-5
- April 11John 13:12-20
- April 12.....John 13:31-35
- April 13.....1 Corinthians 11:23-28

ered His people overnight from Egyptian bondage. (Yeast would not have time to work in the dough.)

By New Testament times, additional items and traditions belonged to the Passover meal. Salt water (tears of bitterness) was used to dip the bitter herbs. Haroset (pasty mixture of nuts, fruit, and wine) and a raw vegetable dipped into a tart liquid were designed to symbolize the bitter experience of making bricks as slaves in Egypt. Four cups of wine consumed throughout the meal were a symbol of joy (redemption from slavery). The participants ate in a reclining position to symbolize their present freedom.

Jesus, however, gave new meaning to this old tradition when He “took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body’” (Mark 14:22). Luke adds, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19), an occasion confirmed by Paul in his Corinthian correspondence (1 Corinthians 11:24). Jesus, speaking in Aramaic, probably meant “This is my body, i.e., a corpse!”

For some time, Jesus had been preparing His disciples for this shocking statement (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 34). Indeed, Mary’s anointing at Bethany should have provided a clue: “She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial” (Mark 14:8). Now, in Jesus’ hands, this broken, unleavened bread came to represent the broken, bruised, sacrificed body of Jesus. The Lord’s death would mean the redemption of the world from its slavery to sin. As long as believers participated in this “new” meal, they would “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The one loaf without yeast would represent, from this point forward, the one community without yeast, a concept well-expressed by Paul (1 Corinthians 5:7, 8). Consequently, as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper with unleavened bread, we celebrate our redemption unto a purity of life based on Christ’s sacrifice for us. While the unleavened bread still represents “a hasty redemption” by a miracle of God, it is now centered on Jesus, the true Israelite, upon whom the sins of the whole world have been placed.

My Blood

The Gospels hint that the later tradition of four cups of wine was used during the first century. Although, Mark’s account does not tell us, most scholars agree that it was the third cup, the cup of redemption (“blessing”) following the meal, when Jesus said: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24). “This is my blood” parallels “This is my body.” The body is

a corpse precisely because the blood has been poured out. The expression “blood of the covenant” clearly echoes Exodus 24:8. While Mark does not use the adjective “new” with “covenant,” it certainly is implied (see Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; possibly alluding to Jeremiah 31:31-34). The vicarious death of Jesus, already referred to by Mark (Mark 10:45), is now clearly made available for the “many,” which does not only include His immediate disciples but all of us today.

Invited to the Table

Mark records Jesus’ Passover conclusion: “I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25; compare Matthew 26:29, Luke 22:16-18). Thus, the Lord moves from drinking the cup of death (v. 24) to the consumption of the cup of glory (v. 25)! This “new situation” apparently finds fulfillment in Jesus’ resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to God’s right hand, as well as with the Holy Spirit’s empowerment of the new Christian community in Jerusalem. Indeed, Jesus gave the Passover a new meaning, a newness that we continually experience as we celebrate and worship each week around the Lord’s table.

Mark intends that each one of us will ask, “Lord, is it I?” and accept the invitation to eat and drink a meal in which we proclaim the death of our Lord. This is pathos of the deepest kind.

*Scripture quotes are from the *New International Version*.

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Lesson text: Mark 14:1-25. Printed text: Mark 14:12-25. Memory text: Mark 14:24. *Lesson based on International Sunday School Lessons, ©2000 by the Lesson Committee.