

Remember the Lamb

Never forget. In a famous speech after World War II, Winston Churchill used those words to remind the world of the great price of war. Certain events in history are so important that special days are set up to remember these events. Moments of silent on Memorial Day; Fireworks on the fourth of July; Turkey dinner for Thanksgiving. But how many of us have the Passover and Maundy Thursday marked down as special days to remember? On these days God gave to his believers special reminders of his love in the form of two special meals. In these meals, we're reminded of slavery. We're reminded of a sacrifice. We're reminded of salvation. We're reminded of a lamb. Tonight, let's spend some time remembering. Let us remember the slavery, the sacrifice and the salvation. Let us remember the Lamb.

First, we remember the slavery. Let's blow some dust off our Bible History. Abraham had Isaac. Isaac had Jacob and Esau. Jacob, also named Israel, had his twelve sons. They moved to Egypt to avoid a famine. Their descendants remained there 480 years. During that time, the Egyptians forced the Israelites into slavery. A little after 1500 B.C. God sent Moses to speak with the Pharaoh of Egypt to let his people go. But Pharaoh refused again and again. Remember, the Ten Plagues? That is this story. God sent nine plagues against the Egyptians, but Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let God's chosen people free. Now we come to our Old Testament reading. God was going to send a final plague against Pharaoh, the death of the firstborn to save his people from slavery.

This last plague would serve as an object lesson for the Israelites. God destroys sinners. God saves his people. We're told that these plagues were God's punishment against the sins of the Egyptians. Of course, we know that all people sin, so what was the difference between Egypt and Israel? The difference wasn't in who they were. The difference was in whom they believed. The Egyptians believed in their false gods and their own power. But the Israelites believed in God's promise that they would be spared if they sprinkled some blood on their door frames. They believed that promise and were saved. The difference was faith.

So let's spend some time remembering that sacrifice. The Israelites weren't saved by some mystical power in the blood of a lamb. They were saved because they took God at his Word. They believed. And since God knows how we work, God made sure to lay out a very clear sign to remind them of his saving grace. The sign was that lamb, a male, a year old and perfect. No defects, no broken bones, nothing. It served as a picture of the sinless Lamb of God, as Peter would later call Christ a "Lamb without blemish or defect". The lamb for the sacrifice was then slaughtered and its blood gathered in a bowl.

The blood also served as a sign for the Israelites. They could see the blood dripping over their doors. The night came and went. And then there was crying and wailing. They could see the blood on their doors and see that they survived that plague of death. All those who did not have the blood to cover them suffered. The Israelites could never forget such a sacrifice. The blood served as an unforgettable sign. The angel of death saw the sign of blood and passed over those homes. That blood served as a sign for the Israelites that they were covered and protected from death. The blood served as a sign that God had brought salvation to his people.

To help his people remember, God marked that day as something special. Because of this special event a whole new calendar year was made. That day would become a feast that was celebrated for generations to come. Jewish families would take in a lamb to be slaughtered, reminding them of the sacrifice. They would eat that same meal, a meal with bitter herbs to remind them of their ancestors' oppression. They would bake unleavened bread to remember the haste at which their ancestors had to leave. Every time those Israelites took part in this feast they would remember their slavery, the sacrifice, and their salvation from the Egyptians.

But why did God need to make such a big deal out of this? Why all the ritual and ceremony? Couldn't he just have saved them and trusted them to remember how amazing their salvation was? God knows his people. He knows the heart, how quick it is to forget the love that was shown. And so the Passover was to be remembered every year as a sign of how God deals with sin and how God deals with believers in grace. He punishes and destroys the unbeliever. Every sinner is in slavery to sin and death. The *death* of the lamb signified this. But to the believer, he offers a sacrifice, a substitute, for the forgiveness of sin. The death of the *lamb* signified this; there was a substitute to die in their place. He gave these signs as constant reminders because he knows how quickly the human heart forgets his love.

Too often we forget God's love. God knows us. He knows our heart. He knows we need those reminders of his love. This is why we have the altar, the baptismal font, the stained glass windows and the Lord's Supper. There are signs all around us that remind us of God's love. We forget the seriousness of the punishment that hung over us. We forget that we deserved eternal death for those sins. We forget the great sacrifice that was needed. We know the story of the cross, but it's easy for us to forget its full meaning and impact in our daily lives. There's that danger of forgetting God's love here in worship, making it nothing more than habit and ritual. There's the danger of forgetting God's love when we go out there and we fail to reflect that love just as Christ loved us.

This picture may help us remember: God walks in here today and asks each of you if you've been perfect. Have you always treated your neighbor with love and respect? Have you always placed others first? Have you always worshipped God with every fiber of your being? One strike, two strike, three strikes against you. The list goes on. God frowns. "I can't let you into heaven. You don't deserve life. You've taken this gift and ruined it. You have broken my Law. You are not perfect. You only deserve death." You're pushed to your knees. Your hair is pulled back and your throat exposed. A knife is placed against your neck. The blade presses against your skin. But then another person enters the room. "Wait!" He cries. Jesus stands you up. And then he kneels down in your place. The knife is held against his throat now. "You're safe." He tells you as the knife slices across his throat. You watch him die in your place. The loss of his life saved you. How could you ever forget such a sacrifice?

But, that we may always remember how we were delivered from our slavery to sin Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper. The first Lord's Supper took place in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem. Jesus had gathered his twelve disciples for the Passover. As they entered that room, he gave them yet another reminder of what his life as the Christ was all about: service to others. Even though the Son of God shouldn't have had to stoop down to wash his disciples' feet, that's what he did. That's what his life was about-sacrifice. He would soon show them the greatest example of love and sacrifice by dying on the cross. So that they would remember this, Jesus made a new meal. In the middle of their Passover meal, when they would have been reminded of the salvation their ancestors had from Egypt, of the slavery and the sacrifice, Jesus ties those pictures to himself. He gives them something new. He takes the bread and blesses it and proclaims, "This is my body." Then he takes the cup of wine, blesses it, proclaiming, "This is my blood." He gives them this special meal. "Do this in remembrance of me." A meal never to be forgotten. It was a meal that pointed to the sacrifice that would happen the following day, when he would place himself under the knife of God's anger and give his body and blood to bring us salvation from our slavery. All those pictures found in the Passover, the slavery, the sacrifice, the salvation, they would now be fully realized on the cross. For there the slavery to sin was broken. There the blood of the Lamb of God was shed as a sacrifice. There Christ won salvation from death.

That message is as real for us today as it was for the disciples. We too were slaves, slaves to our sins. Punishment was coming. We all deserved the same punishment as the Egyptians. Death. But then we hear the words "Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Take and drink, this is my blood shed for you" and we remember the sacrifice. And from his sacrifice on the cross we remember our salvation. This whole meal serves as a reminder of God's great love for you. In a very personal and miraculous way Jesus reminds you of his love because in this meal he truly gives you his body and blood with the bread and the

wine for the forgiveness of sins. This meal serves to remind us of our assured salvation from our slavery to sin because of the sacrifice of Christ.

Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember God's great love. It is a reminder of his new command: love one another as I have loved you. That command is still true today. As Christ loved you, so love one another. Christ loved you as a servant, willing to give everything, even his life. Give your life for others. Live to serve them in love. Bear patiently with family members. Encourage and congratulate friends on their accomplishments. Invite and befriend those people who are not like us. Give some of your time to help a visitor with the service, help a neighbor with some yard work, help a friend in need, and help remind everyone of their salvation from the slavery to sin by the sacrifice of Christ. There are always more than enough ways to show love to all, and the greatest way is to point everyone to their Savior.

So dear brothers and sisters, never forget the imagery of the Passover: the slavery, the sacrifice and the salvation. Never forget the fulfillment of that imagery in Christ's suffering and death. Never forget that you were in slavery to sin. Never forget the sacrifice of Christ to free you from that slavery. Never forget the salvation you now have in Christ. And to remind you and strengthen you in that faith, we have this meal. So come, and remember. Remember the Lamb.