

**Maundy Thursday****Mark 14:22-25****“More Than Meets the Eye”**

We never have seen anything like this. What will happen next? Life is out of our control. Death and destruction are all around us. The government is helpless. The economy is ruined. Am I talking about the United States of April 2020 battling COVID-19? No! It is Egypt 3500 years ago. The one, true, almighty Lord of the universe has sent nine plagues upon Egypt; the death of the firstborn son will mark the tenth and final plague. On every house not protected by the blood of consecrated lambs, the Lord will bring the death of firstborn sons. On the other hand, the Lord’s destroyer will pass over houses marked by the blood of a lamb.

This was such a momentous occasion that God commanded His people to celebrate this Passover annually as a memorial meal. Moses told the people, “when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for He passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when He struck the Egyptians but spared our houses’ ” (Exodus 12). The tenth plague shocks our modern American sensibilities. What kind of God would kill innocent children? Why memorialize such a deadly event?

Now look deeper. There’s more here than meets the eye. After Moses announced the institution of the Passover, “The people bowed their heads and worshiped” (Exodus 12:27b). They recognized that when the Lord speaks His will, our only proper response is worship. The Passover is all about the First Commandment. The tenth plague was divine warfare against God’s idolatrous enemies, against the Egyptian false gods and the oppressors of His people. Under all the Egyptian blood, we should not see innocent victims of an angry god, but impenitent sinners receiving their just judgment from the one Holy God. All of God’s ancient acts of judgment on idolaters—from the Great Flood to the plagues to the conquest of Canaan—warn us about the consequences of idolatry and impenitence. They are previews of God’s final judgment upon all sinful and unbelieving humanity.

This judgment is what we deserve and more. For our idolatrous sins, for every time we have not feared, loved, and trusted in the Lord our God with all our heart, we deserve to have the destroyer spill our blood on the ground, while our souls are taken swiftly to hell for eternal punishment. The Lord is no tame or feeble God. For their own sins, the Israelites deserved the same fate as the Egyptians. But now we look at the blood of the Passover lambs. There we see more than meets the eye. To the naked eye, the blood of lambs and the blood of the Egyptians would appear to be the same sticky red substance, but God attached His Word of grace to the lambs' blood and gave His people a means of salvation from the destroyer. Under the blood of the Passover lambs, there is no merit or worthiness in the Israelites, only the promise of deliverance from their gracious and merciful Lord.

The Passover was to be celebrated by Israel above all as a remembrance of His choosing them and of His protection of them from their enemies. Later the Lord would attach His word of forgiveness to the blood of lambs, goats, and bulls in the sacrificial system operated by the priests at the tabernacle and the temple. Through the pouring out of blood in the Most Holy Place, God provided a means of cleansing and forgiveness for His people's sins, for "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22).

II. There also is more than meets the eye in the Upper Room on the night when Jesus is betrayed. There He celebrates a Passover Meal, with Israel's deliverance from Egypt in view, and the shed blood of Passover lambs in mind. The disciples of Jesus have celebrated this meal dozens of times with their families from little on and probably a few times with Jesus. They knew the Passover liturgy by heart. They think they know what is coming as they celebrate it again with Jesus, but there will be much more than meets the eye when Jesus, the Lord of Israel living in human flesh, fulfills the Passover liturgy in their presence.

Mark writes, "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them" (14:22). So far, so good; no surprises yet. But now a surprise: Jesus says over the bread, "Take; this is My body" (v. 22).

The disciples look at one another with bewildered glances, “what did He just say?”. Then Jesus returns to the regular Passover liturgy: “He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank of it.” Okay, back to normal, the disciples think, looking at each other with relief. But then comes another bombshell! Jesus says to them, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (v. 24). To use that familiar catechism question, what does this mean?

At this unprecedented Passover Meal, Jesus teaches three main things to His disciples. First, that in a short while, His body would be given and His blood shed on the cross—and that by the seemingly senseless slaughter of an innocent Man, they should see His death as a ransom for all humanity, for the sins of the whole world. This is God’s final judgment upon sin, and from that day forward, the only sin that condemns is idolatry, specifically the idolatry of rejecting Jesus as Savior and His death as the sacrifice for the life of the world.

Second, Jesus teaches that in a mysterious and supernatural way, there is more than meets the eye under the simple bread and wine of a typical Passover Meal—now, by the power of His Word, the bread is truly His body and the wine is truly His blood, given to His followers for the forgiveness of sins, for life, and for eternal salvation. By His words “Do this,” Jesus gives this Lord’s Supper to His Church for us to proclaim His death until He returns.

Thirdly, Jesus teaches that the Passover and the whole sacrificial system of Old Testament Israel are previews of His once-for-all sacrificial death on the cross. Now these Old Testament ceremonies have given way to their New Testament fulfillment in His blood shed for us on the cross.

John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus and proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Later, St. Paul wrote, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). At the Last Supper and on Good Friday, John’s preaching was fulfilled when God’s holy, spotless Passover

Lamb, Jesus Christ, offered His life as a ransom so that we sinners don't get what we deserve but instead are given all that Jesus has earned for us. The Old Testament pointed forward to the coming of the Lord in the flesh as the Messiah to win God's forgiveness for all people.

What is in the shed blood of Christ that doesn't meet the eye? Life! The blood of Jesus delivers to us the forgiveness of sins and is the Holy Spirit's antidote to our sinful death. Our life is in the blood of Christ. That is what Christ's disciples receive as the life-giving blood of Jesus is drunk by us in the Lord's Supper: "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." For when we come in faith to Jesus, feeding on His body given and His blood shed for us in Holy Communion, Jesus promises us, "Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:54–56) now and forever. Amen.