The Last Passover/The First Communion
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 80-77

As we prepare our hearts for the table of the Lord, I was thinking in the last couple of days about the very last night that Jesus was with His disciples and reconstructing in my mind in moments of meditation how that scene must have been. And I thought as a preparation for our coming to the table, I might take you back there for that scene.

Open your Bible to Matthew chapter 26...Matthew chapter 26. And beginning at verse 20, let me read down through verse 30. "Now when evening had come He was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. And as they were eating He said, 'Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.' Being deeply grieved they each one began to say to Him, 'Surely not I, Lord.' He answered and said, 'He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him that woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed, it would have been good for that man if he had not been born.' And Judas who was betraying Him answered and said, 'Surely it is not I, rabbi.' He said to him, 'You have said it yourself.' And while they were eating Jesus took some bread and after a blessing He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat, this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until the day when I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom.' And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

Just to look at this text, I trust, can set ourselves back into this scene in such a way as to heighten our senses about the Last Supper and the meaning of this supper tonight which we share in. In verse 20 Matthew doesn't say much, he just says to give us the scene, "When evening had come He was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples." It was after six o'clock on Thursday night. Later that night, over in the Mount of Olives Christ would be captured, brought through a mock trial in the early hours of Friday morning, crucified later that morning to die by three o'clock in the afternoon. He had to eat the Passover meal Thursday night before midnight. Nothing of that meal could be left for morning. So He gathered in the appointed place, some upper room in some home, and there He gathered with His twelve and all it says in the Greek text was He sat down. He reclined.

If you remember back in Exodus chapter 12 when God instituted the Passover, He said you eat it standing up because it will remind you of haste, the haste with which you left Egypt. And through the years and the centuries of celebration of the Passover, it had come to be a somewhat leisurely experience since there was no haste in leaving, they had learned to sit and recline in somewhat

prolonged fashion to articulate very clearly the event that they were celebrating. Frankly that event is known well to all of us. The celebration of the Passover was a celebration of the time when God passed over the houses of the Jews in Egypt where the blood was sprinkled and did not take the life of the firstborn, and then followed up by delivering His people from the land of Egypt. The greatest act of God's redemptive power then was deliverance out of Egypt. The blood on the doorpost and the lintel, the angel of death passed by, they were spared and they were redeemed out of Egypt, taken to the promised land. And so that Passover was the symbol of God's redemptive power. When they sat to eat it they remembered God's great redemption in that He had redeemed them from Egypt.

Matthew doesn't tell us much about the meal. In fact, he really doesn't tell us anything about it. Verse 21 says, "And as they were eating," and that's all he says. And maybe just briefly I could remind you of what the process was like. There were four cups of red wine to be shared. This is the first of those cups. A cup of blessing and that's how the meal was initiated. That cup of red wine was mixed with water. In fact, not only mixed with water but mixed with a double amount of water so that there would be no intoxication, no drunkenness. And if they were to imbibe four such cups, it was important that it be strongly diluted. So it would begin with the first cup of red wine, the cup symbolizing the blessing of God upon them.

Following that first cup of red wine there would be a time to wash their hands, not for the sake of physical cleanliness but as a ceremonial cleansing which was designed to symbolize that each participant in this time of remembrance needed personal cleansing. You could not come before God to celebrate His redemption, His deliverance in an impure fashion, and so there was a ceremonial cleansing before they could eat which was to be symbolic of the cleansing of their hearts. And no doubt it was a time for introspection, a time for personal confession of sin as they were celebrating the salvation of God. They wanted to be sure their hearts were clean.

Following that brief time of cleansing of the hands they would indulge themselves in what could be called, in a sense, the first of a couple of appetizers, bitter herbs. The bitter herbs were symbolic of the bondage in Egypt and the bitterness of that bondage when they were enslaved and when life was so terribly difficult. Those herbs would be dipped in salt and vinegar to make them especially bitter and they would be eaten as a reminder of the bitterness of life before the redemption of God.

Following the bitter herbs would come the second cup of wine. At this point, the father if it was in the family, or the head of the table in the case here, the Lord Himself, He would hold up the second cup and with that the more formal part of the Passover feast was initiated. And he would, holding that second cup, begin to describe the significance of this feast. And he would take the people back to the time of Egyptian captivity and he would talk about the deliverance of almighty God through the plagues, and ultimately drowning Pharaoh's army in the sea and delivering His people in freedom, ultimately into the promised land. And then they would sing the Hallel, and the Hallel is basically Psalm 113 through 118. They would sing perhaps the first few of those psalms together, psalms

which exalt and extol God. And then they would drink that second cup of wine.

That was then followed by unleavened bread. After taking a large flat piece of unleavened bread, the host, the father, the head of the table would then break it and distribute it. That unleavened bread was then dipped into a sauce, a sauce usually made out of sweet apples and nuts called keroseth. And that's the sauce into which they dipped that unleavened bread. Unleavened bread, as you well know, symbolized the fact that they were moving out of Egypt through the redemption of God and there was no leaven in the bread which means there was no influence remaining from the past. In other words, leaven symbolizes influence all through Scripture. Leavened bread means you take something from a past loaf that is fermented, you put it in another loaf but there was nothing from the past to be brought into their new life after redemption and so their bread was unleavened, no yeast in it.

After that, which was in a sense the last of the appetizers, they would engage themselves in eating the lamb. And you remember they were to have a spotless lamb without blemish. That lamb had a very clear prescription as to its character and its slaying. And then they would pursue that eating of the lamb as the high point of the Passover. And, of course, that was symbolic of the lamb that had to be slain and whose blood had to be put on the doorpost and the lintel which was a picture of Jesus Christ Himself, the Lamb of God, who would be slain for the sins of the world. And by the way, at the Passover table there is usually a bowl of water there, a bowl of salt water. That bowl of salt water sits there on the table to remind them of the tears they shed in slavery and also of the parting of the Red Sea.

And so, when we look at the words and as they were eating, we can fill it with a lot of very interesting symbolism. But in the midst of this, a very sad, sad statement by our Lord. He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." And in the midst of what would be a joyous celebration of the redemptive power of God and His great mercy, the Lord Jesus focuses on the tragedy and the reality of what was going on. "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." And verse 22, being deeply grieved, "They each one began to say to Him, 'Surely not I, Lord.'"

I guess they knew the weakness of the flesh. I guess they were honest enough to know their own doubts, their own failures, their own weaknesses. And so, there was a sense of distrust about their own integrity that caused them to say, "Surely not I, Lord." They were grieved, sad, broken-hearted that someone would betray their Lord.

And He answered and said, verse 23, "He who dipped his hand with me in the bowl," he who took the unleavened bread and dipped it into the keroseth, "He who did that with Me is the one who will betray Me." Undoubtedly what happened was, the unleavened bread was passed around the twelve plus the Lord, thirteen in all. And the bowl containing the sauce was also passed. And it would be passed so that when one passed it to another and put it between them the two could dip into the same bowl,

which very likely indicates that Judas had arranged himself right next to Jesus and so together they would have dipped. Or perhaps there were a few bowls on the table and Jesus and Judas dipped into the same bowl which again says the same thing, that he had seated himself in proximity to Christ. This satanically inspired man who will betray the Son of God has immense amount of nerve and gaul to do what he is doing here.

And so, Jesus says it's the one who put his hand in the sop with Me. Verse 24, "The Son of Man is to go," He says, "just as it is written of Him." It has to happen. It has to be. "But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed, it would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

Although it is appointed by God and it must happen and I must die and I've been born to die and I am the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world, as it says in Revelation 13, although that is all true, woe to the man who does this. Better if he had never been born. Better never to have existed than to exist forever in hell. And the hottest hell would be reserved for Judas because he trampled underfoot the Son of God. He had the greatest exposure of any person who ever lived and didn't believe. So, the condemnation of Judas ranks at the peak. However hot hell can be, it will be for him, better he'd never been born.

There is Jesus then in the midst of this time wanting to instruct His disciples and turn the old feast into a new feast. And it's interrupted by the heinousness of this crime. Verse 25 shows the brash boldness of Judas, "And Judas who was betraying Him," it was already in motion, it was already planned and set up, "answered and said, 'Surely it is not I, Rabbi.' He said to him, 'You've said it yourself.'" It was him. What a masquerade. And all this, says verse 26, while they were eating.

This is the last Passover by God's reckoning. There are Jews today that still hold a Passover but it is not authorized, ordained by God. This is the last Passover that God ever authorized, that God ever approved of because immediately in verse 26 the Lord Jesus introduces a new celebration. No more Passovers because the redemptive power of God will no longer be celebrated in remembering Egypt, the redemptive power of God will be celebrated in remembering the cross which provided a far greater redemption. The redemption in Egypt was a redemption physically out of slavery into freedom. The redemption Christ accomplished on the cross was a redemption out of sin into righteousness.

And so, while they were eating verse 26 says, Jesus began to turn the Passover into a new celebration. "Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat, this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them saying, 'Saying drink from it all of you for this is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.'"

Here Jesus takes the bread, the unleavened bread which symbolized the fact that God's people having been redeemed would bring across none of the influences of their former life and He says, "No longer is this bread to remind you of Egypt, it is to remind you of My body...My body which is given for you." Herein is the great redemption accomplished, through the sacrifice of the Son of God as He gives His body in death on the cross. And so He says, as Luke 22:19 records it, "This is My body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of Me." And so, the unleavened bread then is turned from its past meaning to a brand new meaning.

And then it says, "He took the cup, verse 27, what cup is this? The third cup now, this would be the third cup in the Passover, it is called the cup of blessing. But if you read 1 Corinthians 10:16 and 21, in 16 it's the cup of blessing, in 21 it's the cup of the Lord. And He transformed the cup of blessing out of the Passover into the cup of the Lord, the cup which remembers the Lord. "And given thanks, He gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.'" And He says, "No longer will this cup of red wine remind you of the blood of a lamb spread on the doorpost and the lentil, no longer will it remind you of some animal sacrifice that could not take away sins, from now on it will remind you of the sacrifice of My blood." You can go way back in to the Old Testament, or you can go way deep in to the New Testament to Hebrews 9:22 and you will find that all covenants are marked by blood-shedding. And here the New Covenant is marked by anticipation that Christ will shed His blood. And as Hebrews says, "For without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." And so says our Lord, "From now on this cup will remind you of My blood which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."

So He transformed the Old into the New. And then He says in verse 29, here is the permanent institution of what I have just done, Passover is finished, this new feast will go on, "I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until the day when I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom." He also said, as the gospels record, "Do this until I do it with you again," and here He says it will be in the Kingdom when we do it again, but from now till the Kingdom, you keep doing it...you keep doing it.

And no doubt, after that third cup came the singing of two more Psalms, likely Psalm 115 and 116 out of the Hillel, and that would be followed by the fourth cup in the Passover which was followed by the final two Psalms, Psalm 117 and Psalm 118 and that's exactly what verse 30 says. "After singing a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives," where He would be betrayed, captured, from where He would be taken for His mock trial and crucified.

This service which we engage into tonight is as simply held, as simply designed as was that original service of which we have just read. Simply do we receive the bread and the cup. The bread is the reminder of Christ's body. The cup is the reminder of His blood. Both of which were given for us to accomplish the forgiveness of sins. We are to do it from now on until the day we do it with Him.

You say, "Will we do it with Him in His Kingdom?" Yes. "Why?" Because even in the Kingdom we'll want to remember and celebrate His redemption...maybe there more than even here because we will be enjoying the fullness of the blessing of His Kingdom. And its riches and its wonders will be at hand and fully sensitized and realized, we will engage ourselves in a celebration that knows no equal in this time and in this world. But until that time we keep this feast. It is our Passover. It is the one that Christ gave us. It is the one that we are to be faithful to.

And so do we come to this table in order that we might celebrate the death of the One who gave Himself for us. Let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, it was such a simple night in some ways, and yet so profound, the simple bread, the simple cup and yet they speak of the redemption of many and the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven and the promise of eternal life. Lord, we have gathered here in this place, half a world away from where You met and two millennia later and it hasn't changed. We thank You that through all of these centuries the church has passed down the simplicity of this, that we who take the bread and the cup do so as if we were there with You that night, remembering Your body and Your blood given for us to pay the penalty for our sin as the sacrifice required. Father, we love You, we thank You for giving Your Son, Christ. We thank You for giving Yourself in obedience to the Father and love to us to redeem us. Holy Spirit, we thank You for granting us new birth and applying forgiveness to us. And we ask that in this time You might prepare our hearts that even as in the taking of the Passover there was a cleansing of the hands to symbolize the need to cleanse the heart. May we at this moment now cleanse our own hearts, lest...as Paul said...we take in an unworthy manner and bring judgment on ourselves, for You do not look lightly on one who defiles this table by coming here with sin harbored, loved. So, Lord, help us to yield up all the sin that so easily captures heart and mind, hand and feet and the tongue as well, all those sins of thought and word and action and cleanse us, wash us clean. We thank You for the love that seeks to do that, cleanse us that we might partake in a worthy manner, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).