

## **The Table**

### **Matthew 26:17-29**

Jesus' cousin John the Baptist was standing near the Jordan River where he was baptizing people to wash away their sin. He saw Jesus walking by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Another cousin of Jesus' named who was one of His disciples was given a vision near the end of his life. In this vision he saw thousands upon thousands, angels and the elders of heaven and eventually the whole of the earth singing this song at the end of all things:

**Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might  
and honor and glory and blessing!  
To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"**

### **Revelation 5:12-13**

Jesus is the Lamb of God. The Lamb who was slain.

Slain for you and me.

Jesus grew up hearing the history of the Passover; of God's deliverance of His people the Jews from slavery and captivity in Egypt—which is a story of a young, unblemished lamb whose blood sets God's people free. We know that Jesus' family traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover every year. It was on a trip when Jesus was merely twelve that he stayed behind in Jerusalem, causing Joseph and Mary to panic, so that he could dazzle the Temple rabbis and the teachers with his teaching.

Twenty years later Jesus returned again to Jerusalem for the Passover and he sat once again with a group of men—not the elite of Jerusalem, but Galilean—fishermen, a zealot, a tax collector and one would betray him—men whose names would echo throughout history and the world. And this time, He was the Rabbi, the men were His disciples and He was the Passover Lamb—whose body would be broken and blood would be spilt so deliver God's people from slavery and captivity to sin.

Passover was on Friday, the 15th of Nisan on the Jewish calendar, early April, according to the Julian calendar—the beginning of Spring. Jesus had entered Jerusalem to a hero's welcome, riding a young donkey five days earlier. The people had laid out palm branches and threw their clothing on the ground and shouted, "Hosanna, to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Two days before Passover, on Wednesday, one of Jesus' disciples—Judas Iscariot—met with the chief priests, the religious leaders who were looking to kill Jesus, asking "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?"

They agreed upon a price of thirty pieces of silver to betray God.

That is why in some traditions the Wednesday of Holy Week is known as Spy Wednesday.

Jesus and the disciples stayed outside of town that week likely in a cave on the Mount of Olives because the city was filled to bursting with pilgrims because of the Holy Day. On Thursday Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem with instructions.

**"Go and prepare the Passover when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, 'Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there."**

**Luke 22:8-12**

Peter and John followed Jesus' instructions and readied the room where the most well-known meal in the history of the world would be taken. As the sun went down and Passover began Jesus and the rest of the disciples arrived at the upper room of a large home of a wealthy family who were friends of Jesus.

The home sat on what is today called Mount Zion—just southwest of Jerusalem's city walls, overlooking the Hinnom Valley. **(insert map)** It was the home of a woman named Mary whose son was John Mark—the author of the Gospel of Mark and later a disciple of Peter.

After Jesus' resurrection Mary's and John Mark's home would become the center of the Gospel movement in the world. It was in this home that Jesus disciples gathered with windows and doors locked because they were afraid the Jewish religious leaders would arrest them. It was in this home where they prayed together. It was in this home that they elected Mathias to succeed Judas as one of the twelve. It was in this home that the Holy Spirit fell on Pentecost birthing the Church. It was in this home that Peter returned to after an angel freed him from the prison of King Herod Agrippa, who reigned over Judea and Jerusalem on behalf of the Romans.

This home was the birthplace of the Church. And sometime later in the first century a church was built over the home called "The Church of the Apostles." Its door faced northeast toward Jesus' empty tomb less than a half-mile away as a reminder of the event that changed the world. Those early disciples who broke bread with Jesus in that home, hid there after His death, prayed there after His ascension to the Father, worshipped there, returned there after their arrests, received the Holy Spirit there believed Jesus is alive. They believed His tomb empty. For them the cross and the empty tomb was the center of their life, the very gravity of their existence.

And this home was the center of this movement that would change the world and change the eternity of everyone here today and billions around the world.

The theologian N.T. Wright put it like this:

**The critical thing right from the beginning was that the resurrection of Jesus demonstrated that He was indeed the Messiah, had borne the destiny of His people in carrying the Roman cross outside the city walls and that his followers in being witnesses to these things were thereby commissioned to take the news of His victory to tend ends of the earth.**

Peter and John, Bartholomew, James, Matthew, Thomas, Simon, Andrew, Phillip, Thaddeus were sent to the ends of the earth to carry the greatest message in the history of the world. Just like you and me.

But when Peter and John found John Mark and Mary's home and the rest of the 12 showed up at their door atop the hill we call Zion to celebrate Passover, they had no idea of the destiny awaiting them that would shift into overdrive in just a few hours.

They believed it was just another Passover—just like Israel had celebrated for 1500 years.

To this day it's called a Seder meal—the traditional Jewish Passover feast celebrated by Jesus' every year of His life. The Seder Jesus knew included a lamb, bitter herbs dipped in saltwater a, paste of fruit and nuts and spices, unleavened bread, and four cups of wine.

Every element of the feast was crafted to relive the Jews deliverance from slavery and captivity in Egypt at the strong right hand of God. The bitter herbs reminded them of the bitterness of their trials in the Egypt, the saltwater of their tears they shed as slaves. The paste of fruit and nuts, spices recalled the mortar of the bricks that Pharaoh commanded their people to make without straw—the punishing labor that broke their backs and spirits. The unleavened bread evokes the haste with which God commanded them to leave Egypt. There was no use for leaven because the bread did not have time to rise. God commanded the people to eat that first Passover meal standing up,

**"With your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste."**

#### **Exodus 12:11**

They were to eat quickly, ready to go, in expectation of the LORD setting them free.

There were four cups of wine at the Passover meal. They took these four cups from God's promise in **Exodus 6:6-7** Say therefore to the people of Israel:

**'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.**

The first cup was the cup of deliverance because the Lord promised, "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

The second cup was the cup of freedom because the Lord promised, "I will deliver you from slavery."

The third cup was the cup of redemption because the Lord promised, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm with great acts of judgment."

And the fourth was the cup of consummation because the Lord promised, "I will be your God and you shall know that I am the Lord your God."

There was also, of course, the lamb.

For Passover God commanded His people to take that young lamb from the herd on the tenth day of Nisan and keep him in their home. Jewish tradition says that the lamb lived in the home with the family for four days—like a pet, a member of the household.

When I was growing up we often fed bottle calves and they became like pets. After they grew we would sell some and butcher some to fill our freezer. Our parents never told us who was sold and who was sirloin—because they were afraid we would not eat it if we knew. Bottle-feeding those calves has given me a permanent appreciation for the sacrifice that is a steak or a filet or a hamburger.

As Jesus dwells with us through the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our life we develop a permanent appreciation for the great love sacrifice of the Lamb of God. On the fourteenth day of Nisan that little, young, unblemished lamb was roasted on a spit, over a fire; the lamb hung over the fire on the spit in a shape similar to the cross—said the second century Church writer Justin Martyr.

Nine times the Lord brought plagues upon their Egyptian captors coercing Pharaoh to let His people go. He turned the water of the Nile River into blood, spread frogs and gnats and flies and locusts across the land. He had infected the people with boils, killed the Egyptian livestock, rained heavy hail down on the crops and people, and covered all of Egypt with darkness for three days. But Pharaoh, whose heart had been made diamond hard did not relent.

Finally, the LORD let loose a tenth plague. He would kill the firstborn son in every household—except those that had spread the blood of the young, unblemished, perfect lamb on the doorposts and across lintel of their home.

This invitation was open to Hebrew and Egyptian household alike. Anyone who made their home and life under the blood of the Lamb.

Jesus and His disciples sat at U-shaped table that night, a Roman configuration known as a triclinium. The triclinium was often made of couches, but the Bible suggests that Jesus and the disciples sat behind low tables on pillows on the floor. **(insert painting)**

There was always a specific seating arrangement around the tables. We know Judas sat right next to Jesus, the host, on his left-hand side as the number one guest—after only Jesus in the seat of honor. As Jesus and the disciples reclined and ate, laughed and enjoyed each other's company and relived their deliverance from slavery and captivity, Jesus stunned the group with a shocking announcement:

**"Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."**

**Matthew 26:21-25**

What do we make of this?

Jesus knowingly placed Judas, whose betrayal would go down as history's greatest act of treachery, at His side, in the place of honor.

It speaks volumes about the grace and love of God. **Exodus 34:6** proclaims our God is:

**Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.**

Jesus even loves and welcomes traitors around His table, even at his side, as His guest of honor. John's story of the Last Supper tells us that Jesus even washed Judas' feet. This tells us that as far as the east is from the west so will our sins be from us. It tells us that God is far more willing to forgive than even we are to ask. It tells us that He has forgiven us even before we sin. It tells us that if the historic treacherous, treasonous, traitor Judas Iscariot is welcome at His table—are not we?

While Judas still sat at Jesus' side—following the meal, Jesus took some of the leftover unleavened bread and He gave thanks for it and then He broke it, saying

**Take, eat, this is my body.**

**Matthew 26:27**

There are two Scriptural principles at work.

First, before God uses someone for their greatest and highest purpose, He always breaks them. Whether it is Joseph who was a slave and a prisoner, Moses, who spent 40 years in the desert tending his father-in-law's sheep before God called him to lead Israel or Samson who was blinded and shaved and humiliated before he brought the temple of Dagon crashing down on the Philistines, King David who sinned grievously, Paul who was blinded or even His only Son whose body was broken to set us free from slavery and captivity to sin.

If you are broken now or if you are being broken, know that God can take what is intended for evil and use it for good. God, if you allow Him, will resurrect you from your brokenness to use you for your greatest and highest purpose.

How?

Jesus gave thanks for being broken. Thanksgiving is the precursor to being used by God in our brokenness—to give thanks in all things—to maintain the unswerving belief that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

After the bread, Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, took the third cup. The cup of redemption and He gave thanks again He said,

**"Drink of it all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."**

**Matthew 25:27-28**

And then Jesus looked at the fourth cup, the cup of consummation, the cup which the Seder meal promised, "I will be your God and you shall know that I am the Lord your God." And Jesus said He would not drink from that fourth cup "until I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom."

In other words, Jesus, said "We still have unfinished business, I am coming back and until I am with you again and heaven and earth have been made new, and the dwelling of God is with women and

men and you are My people and I am Your God and death is no more, neither is mourning or crying or pain—and the former things have passed away—I will not celebrate fully, I will not rest."

By leaving the fourth cup, the cup of consummation filled, Jesus says that His goal is not just redemption and the forgiveness of sin—Jesus said His goal is to be with us, as one, forever. And so Jesus left the meal unfinished until we are reunited with God in full fellowship and communion

As followers of Jesus, we are in the midst of the feast now. This is the meal. Our life is intended to be the communion feast of God.

As the meal ended, Jesus turned to Judas and said, "**What you are going to do, do quickly.**" (John 13:27) Jesus knew with whom Jesus had met with the day before and Jesus commanded, "Carry out quickly the task to which Satan has set your hear and mind."

And Judas complied "**He immediately went out. And it was night.**"

#### **John 13:30**

As the Supper ended late in the night, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn before they left. It was the Hallel, the traditional Passover song. Among the words they sang that dark night were from Psalm 118:

**The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar! You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!**

#### **Psalm 118:22, 27-29**

Remember that phrase—the stone that has been rejected has become the cornerstone.

After they sang and the meal concluded, they made the mile long journey back to a cave in a place called Gethsemane. As they passed the Mount of Olives the full moon illuminated tombs and hundreds of graves dotting the hillside.

In just a couple of days many of those graves would be empty.

But before that could happen, before dead men could live again, the Lamb of God must be delivered to the slaughter.

And the one whose hand would lead Him there approached.

