

This morning, I am in the twenty-eighth week of a sermon series that I've entitled "Meeting Jesus." I am making my way through Luke's account of the life of Jesus, looking at various interactions that people had with Jesus, in order to better understand what it means to know and follow Him. This morning, we are going to be in Luke 22:7-30, looking at the interactions between Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper.

Luke 22:7-30 - Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." ⁹ "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. ¹⁰ He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, ¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" ¹² He will show you a large room upstairs, **all furnished**. Make preparations there." ¹³ They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. ¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the **kingdom of God comes**." ¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. ²¹ But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. ²² The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!" ²³ They began to question among themselves which of them it might be **who would do this**. ²⁴ A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. ²⁵ Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you **as one who serves**. ²⁸ You are those who have stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

We are nearing the end of Jesus' life. After this meal, Jesus will be betrayed by Judas, arrested by the Jewish authorities, put on trial before the local Roman

authorities, nailed to a cross, and die before rising again three days later. But this death is more than just a tragic event; in this passage, Jesus uses the annual feast of the Passover to explain the meaning of his impending death.

Before I explain the significance of the Passover, just look at Jesus' emotions surrounding this meal:

Luke 22:14-16 - When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

This meal clearly means a lot to him, because he knows it will be the last meal he shares with them, and probably because he knows that he will use this meal to explain to them what his death will mean.

If you're unfamiliar with Passover, remember that thousands of years ago, the people of God, the Israelites, ended up as slaves in Egypt. And the people cried out to God in their slavery, and God raised up Moses and Aaron to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the people go. God sends plague after plague, but Pharaoh refuses to let them go until the tenth plague:

Exodus 12:3-14 - Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household... ⁵ The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶ Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷ Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where **they eat the lambs**... ¹¹ This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover. ¹² On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you **when I strike Egypt**. ¹⁴ This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance."

The tenth plague is that every firstborn son will be killed, except for those households where a lamb has been slain and its blood put on the doorposts. And so,

this lamb was slain so that the nation could go free. The lamb's blood saved them from slavery, rescued them from death. And to commemorate, the people of God were to eat the Passover meal every year, to remember that they have been set free by God, to look on the lamb and remember that **this lamb died instead of me, so that I could go free.**

And so God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and they traveled to Mt. Sinai, where God gave Moses the covenant and the law. When God gave Moses the law at Mt. Sinai, he instituted something called the **sin offering**. There is a lot of language of **animal sacrifice** in the Old Testament, which sounds weird to us, but had a point back then. There is evil in the world, and we have each contributed to that evil. If God were to get rid of evil, therefore, he would have to get rid of us. But God loves us and does not want to get rid of us, and so he made a way for sinful people to be made right with Him. An animal would be killed in their place as a sin offering, as an atonement, to cover over their sins, to pay the penalty for our sins. And the high priest would sprinkle the blood of the animal throughout the temple to purify the land, to clean away evil in the community.

Leviticus 5:5–6 - When anyone becomes aware that they are guilty in any of these matters, they must confess in what way they have sinned. ⁶ As a penalty for the sin they have committed, they must bring to the Lord a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for them for their sin.

And God also instituted the **Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur**, the annual day set aside for confessing sin and receiving forgiveness. In Leviticus 16, in the instructions for the Day of Atonement, the high priest would choose two goats: one would be sacrificed as a sin offering, and the other, the scapegoat, would make atonement by being sent out into the desert.

Leviticus 16:20–22 - “When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹ He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.”

And into that context comes Jesus, celebrating a Passover meal with his disciples. But instead of following the usual liturgy about the meaning of the bread and the cups of wine, Jesus changes the story to make it about Himself.

Luke 22:19-20 - And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

Who does that? Imagine taking the story of the 4th of July, of our independence, and saying that it is really about you? That is the closest parallel to what Jesus is doing here. Jesus says that the bread and wine are about him – his body, and his blood. He will suffer and die so that they might go free. He is saying that there is a greater Exodus about to happen, to which that first Exodus pointed. Not deliverance from slavery to a nation, but deliverance from slavery to sin and death itself. He will die to rescue them from slavery to sin, and then enter into a new covenant with them. Notice once again the language of substitutionary atonement, of one dying to cover the sins of others.

But there is something strange about this meal. The bread is there, the wine is there, but where is the main course? Where is the lamb that they can point to and say “this lamb died so that we could go free?” Where is the Lamb???

He’s standing right there. Jesus is the Lamb who will be slain so that the world might go free.

1) Jesus is the true Passover lamb who died to save us from death and to free us from slavery to sin

This is why John the Baptist said this when he first saw Jesus:

John 1:26–31 - “I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. ²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

John sees Jesus, and calls him the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. It’s a strange thing to call someone, unless you understand what the lamb has symbolized throughout their nation’s history.

Now, Passover takes place on the 14th of the month Nisan. Jesus enters Jerusalem four days before Passover. Remember what we read earlier in Exodus 12: God told the Israelites in Egypt that on the 10th day of Nisan, they were to take a lamb without defect, and care for it until the 14th day, when the lamb would be killed and its blood put on the doorposts so that the angel of death would pass over their house.

Every year the Israelites celebrated Passover, and what that meant is that on the 10th day of Nisan, thousands of lambs would be driven up to Jerusalem throughout the day. The historian Josephus tells us that one year a census was taken of the number of lambs slain for Passover and the figure was 256,500. That means that Jesus is entering Jerusalem on the 10th of Nisan, on a donkey, surrounded by lambs who are about to be slain for the Passover. Symbolism, anyone? And just like the Passover lamb, Jesus would go to the temple to be “examined” to ensure that he was without defect, without sin, so that he could be an acceptable sacrifice.

As Peter said:

1 Peter 1:18-19 - For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a **lamb** without blemish or defect.

And as Jesus put it:

Mark 10:45 – “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus was the ransom for sin, the atoning sacrifice, by his death covering the debt we owed for contributing to evil and death in the world.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who

had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus became sin and we gain his righteousness. The sacrificial system, the lamb, the cup was of course pointing to the once for all sacrifice of the Servant, Jesus, who took up our sins upon himself and paid the penalty once for all.

Hebrews 10:1–4, 10-14 - The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. ⁴ It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to **take away sins**... And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

He has made us perfect forever by His death for us. From Palm Sunday to the cross, we see the culmination of this theme of substitutionary sacrifice, as Jesus takes our place, takes your place, willingly giving His life for you out of love, that you might be forgiven, that you might be right with God, that you might have eternal life. As the prophet Isaiah put it:

Isaiah 53:4–6 - Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Christ is our Passover lamb. In John's vision in Revelation, John weeps because no one in heaven and on earth is found who can save humanity from their sins. But then he sees this:

Revelation 5:6–10 - Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders... ⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the **prayers of God's people**. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Back to the story in Luke. Remember how emotional Jesus was about this opportunity to share this final meal with his disciples and to communicate to them the meaning of his death. And as Jesus is acting out the meaning of his death, this exchange happens:

Luke 22:21-24 – "But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. ²² The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!" ²³ They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this. ²⁴ A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Jesus is acting out the meaning of his death, and the disciples break out into a discussion about who will betray Jesus that eventually becomes an argument about which one of them is the greatest. Amazing how clueless and self-centered they can be, just like us, in response to Jesus' incredible sacrifice. But instead of smiting them, Jesus tells them that greatness is measured differently in God's eyes:

Luke 22:25 -27 - Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."

And then he goes on to promise them something that would have been beyond their understanding, but shows the glory they will share in for their service in this life:

Luke 22:28-30 – “You are those who have stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

2) Every act of sacrificial love in this world achieves an eternal glory

Their suffering and sacrifice on this side is achieving for them an eternal glory. As Paul put it:

2 Corinthians 4:16–18 - Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

There is no greater love than sacrificial love. There is a story that makes the rounds on social media that you may have heard; it goes something like this:

Many years ago, when I worked as a volunteer at Stanford Hospital, I got to know a little girl named Liza who was suffering from a rare and serious disease. Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her five-year-old brother, who had miraculously survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to **combat the illness**. The doctor explained the situation to her little brother, and asked the boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. I saw him hesitate for only a moment before taking a deep breath and saying, "Yes, I'll do it **if it will save Liza**."

As the transfusion progressed, he lay in bed next to his sister and smiled, as we all did, seeing the color returning to her cheeks. Then his face grew pale and his smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, "Will I start to die right away?"

Being young, the boy had misunderstood the doctor; he thought he was going to have to give her all his blood.

Now, this story is almost certainly not true, as a quick check of Snopes.com reveals that a version of this story has showed up in multiple books and movies over the past 100 years. But the reason this story tugs at our heartstrings is that it taps into something that seems to be a deep truth, that the greatest love of all is to lay down

our lives for someone else. This is why this little boy's willingness to give his blood to his sister is so moving, because he believed he was giving his life for her, dying so that she could live. This is why we honor those who serve in the military. It is why we are moved by the story of the first responders who risked their lives to save others in the World Trade Center on 9/11. There is something about the idea of substitutionary sacrifice, of giving our lives for another, of dying in another's place, that evokes awe, wonder, admiration, and oftentimes even tears.

John 15:13 – “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.”

Romans 5:6–8 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

3) Remember Jesus' death by loving sacrificially

If you want to remember Jesus' death and its meaning, yes, you should celebrate the Lord's Supper. But you also should “do this,” i.e. do what he did, give your life sacrificially for others – in remembrance of Him.

There is no love greater than substitutionary sacrifice, being willing to suffer and even die for another, in the place of another. This is the love that Jesus has for you. This is the same love you show whenever you forgive someone or treat someone not according to what their sins deserve. This is the love you show when you take on the hard work and bear the burden for others. How can you lay down your life for others?