

## Symbols of Lent: The Passover Meal

### Exodus 12:1-14 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, <sup>2</sup> "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. <sup>5</sup> The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. <sup>9</sup> Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. <sup>10</sup> Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> "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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> "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 Passover meal is chock-full of symbolism. There's the Passover lamb, this one year old male lamb without defect, which is sacrificed and its blood used on the doorposts to save the entire household from death. There's no doubt that this lamb is a symbol, a foreshadowing, of Jesus, especially as you have multiple references through the New Testament of Jesus being called the Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. There are the bitter herbs served in the Passover meal used to remind the people of the centuries of slavery that they endured in Egypt - and not just the bitterness of being owned by someone else and doing back-breaking labor, but also the bitter pain of having their children taken away, thrown into the Nile, murdered because Pharaoh thought the Israelites were getting too numerous and too strong. Even the way that people dressed for the Passover meal had significance. "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." (verse 11) They were supposed to be ready to go at a moment's notice. For us, it would be like eating a meal with our shoes on, our jackets zipped up, phone and wallet in pocket, watch on, backpack packed and on your back because at any moment you will have to leave. God knew that night the Israelites were going to be leaving Egypt for good and would start heading to the promised land.

God also told the Israelites to have bread without yeast for the Passover meal. This makes sense because if they were going to be leaving in a hurry, then they aren't going to have time to let the yeast take effect and let the bread rise. But there is more to this lack of yeast picture than just not having enough time for the bread to rise. In the verses immediately after our reading from Exodus chapter 12, we learn that God wanted the Passover celebrated with seven days of eating bread without yeast. On the first day of this Passover celebration, every household was to remove the yeast from their house. Anyone who ate something with yeast in it would be cut off, banished, removed from God's saving promise. There was a spiritual component to the removal of the yeast in addition to a physical one.

Although there is nothing inherently wrong with eating bread with yeast in it (so you don't have to go home tonight after service and throw away your fluffy bread), the Bible often uses the effects of yeast in a batch of dough as a picture of what sin does to us. Just as a little yeast will make the whole batch of dough rise and expand, so sin, just a little sin, will infect the whole person. The Bible draws the comparison that sin is like an infectious disease that spreads through the whole body quickly and easily.

This is what happened to the Corinthian congregation as we heard in second lesson today. There was an issue in the Corinthian congregation: a man was sleeping with his stepmother while she was still married to his father. The congregation not only knew of the situation and didn't do anything about it, but they were proud that they allowed such a relationship in their church. They boasted about it, boasting about their tolerance and their permissiveness. Paul wrote to them, "Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast." (1 Corinthians 5:6-7a) Your permissiveness is not God-pleasing. You are allowing sin to grow and expand in your congregation. If you don't get rid of it, it will consume you and cut you off from God. Get rid of this leaven of sin just like the Israelites got rid of the leaven for the festival of the Passover.

What leaven do we allow to grow in our lives? Are we guilty of allowing the old leaven of the permissiveness of sin into our congregation like the Corinthians had? Or is our leaven something else?

Consider for a moment what we build our lives around. We build it around work schedules, around family events, but we also build our lives around non-essentials. We build our lives around entertainment and recreation, living for the weekend. Sometimes these things – work, family, entertainment, recreation – take priority in our schedules over spending time with God.

I look around on Maundy Thursday evening, and I know there is a leaven of pride tempting me. I can look around church tonight, see all the empty places, and think smugly to myself, “God surely loves me because I’m here tonight. I made the time. I got to church. I am a really good Christian, unlike those other people who couldn’t be bothered to show up even though I know that they are perfectly capable of coming.” This leaven of pride rises to then start viewing myself as if I am in a class above other Christians, like I am a Christian elitist because I schedule my life around God, around special worship services. This leaven continues to rise as I begin to look down on others, malign them, turn up my nose because they aren’t as faithful as me. And instead of checking on them, seeking them out because I am concerned for them, I stay silent and instead grow even more prideful in my life as a Christian.

This is the old leaven that we need to get rid of before it consumes us. If we become Christian elitists taking pride in how we arrange our lives to be at church more than other people, we run the danger of thinking that I get the credit for being such a better Christian than that other person, that I make myself a good Christian – not God’s grace. If we silently and passively permit other people to prioritize their lives around anything else other than God, then I become guilty of not warning them of the spiritual danger. I become party to their sins. This is how sin infects us, just like leaven spreads throughout the whole batch of dough.

What’s the solution? It’s Christ, our Passover Lamb. He is that young male lamb without defect. He’s perfect. He has been sacrificed for us. It is his blood that saves us from that destruction and death that comes from the leaven of sin because the blood of the Lamb, the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, the purifies us from every sin. His blood removes that infectious leaven from us.

Because Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us, he gets rid of that leaven that would consume us. Now that it’s gone, we do, in fact, change our lives and live in such a way that we can be constantly covered by the blood of the Lamb. We don’t do this to take pride in the extra church services we come to, but because I want, I need, to be covered by the blood of the Lamb that saves me from death. I want my life to revolve around this, to constantly see what Christ has done for me.

God covers me by that life-saving blood of the Lamb through a meal. For the Old Testament Israelites, it was the Passover. For us, it is the Lord’s Supper, this new thing that God did on that night when he was betrayed. He gives us his body and his blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of our sins, for the removal of that old leaven of pride and wickedness. In this way, God saves me from eternal death that comes from that all-consuming leaven of malice and wickedness. His meal changes my life.

When God instituted the Passover meal, he told Moses and Aaron “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.” (verse 2) Other cultures planned out their years by the growing seasons, but not God’s people. Their calendar would now revolve around this event, this Passover, this deliverance from slavery, deliverance from death by the blood of the one year old male lamb without defect. Their year would be shaped and formed around what God had done for them.

In the same way, that’s why we have made it a priority to be here tonight. If there is any leaven of pride in our lives, Lord, remove it from us. Cover us with the blood of the Lamb, your blood. Save me from my sinful corruption, from the old leaven, and fill me instead of the unleavened bread of your sincerity and truth of what you have done. Fill me with pride in what you have done for me, not what I do. Fill me with your holy supper tonight for the forgiveness of my sins. You, my Passover Lamb, have purified me. You have taken away the leaven of my sins. Amen.