

The Celebration of the Passover, and the Institution of the Lord's Supper

Matthew 26:17-30

Matthew 26:17-30 - *"Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, 'Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?'"* ¹⁸ *And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples."'"* ¹⁹ *So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.*

²⁰ *When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve.* ²¹ *Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me."* ²² *And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?"*

²³ *He answered and said, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me.* ²⁴ *The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, 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."* ²⁵ *Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, "Rabbi, is it I?" He said to him, "You have said it."*

²⁶ *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."* ²⁷ *Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.* ²⁸ *For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* ²⁹ *But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."*

³⁰ *And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."*

Background Notes

"Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, 'Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?'" (v17). The Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread are together in the Jewish calendar. Passover lasts for one day, and the following seven days are the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These two feasts are so closely related that the whole week is known as "Passover Week." So "the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread" was Passover. Passover began that evening, since the Jewish day always begins at sunset.

We believe that the "preparation day" for the Passover was on the Thursday of our Lord's final week. The Lord would eat the Passover meal with His disciples on Thursday evening, after sunset, which would be the beginning of Passover. The Lord would be arrested later that night and tried before Pilate early on Friday, and then crucified early Friday afternoon before the Passover day was over at sunset. So the Lord and His disciples ate the Passover meal on Thursday night, at the beginning of Passover, and the Lord was crucified on Passover Day. He died on Friday afternoon, before the day of Passover ended. When you read the commentaries, you will find that there are some other details that come into the picture, but I believe the account I've just given is the most simple, straightforward harmonization of Scripture.

The Lord said to His disciples, *“Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, ‘My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples’”* (v18). The Lord may have previously contacted this man and made some preliminary arrangements, but maybe not. If He didn’t, this would be another indication of our Lord’s omniscience as the Son of God.

In verse 25, after the Lord had indicated that one of His disciples would betray Him, Judas said, *“‘Rabbi, is it I?’”* And the Lord said to Him, *“You have said it.”* In other words, *“Yes, you are the one.”* Because they were reclining on low couches around a large table, most likely the other disciples didn’t hear all of the conversation that went on between the Lord and Judas. Judas would have been located close to the Lord at the table, because he dipped his bread into the same dish that the Lord dipped His bread (v23). Based on the account in John 13, we believe that Judas left the Passover meal at this point, and thus he was not present for the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

Doctrinal Points

1. **“The Last Supper” commemorated the Exodus from Egypt.**

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are both memorial feasts. They look back to the time of the Exodus, when the people of Israel were delivered from slavery in Egypt. In fact, these Feasts were instituted at the time of the Exodus. Exodus 12:12-14 about Passover: *“For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ‘So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.”* This was the institution of Passover.

Exodus 12:15-17, about Feast of Unleavened Bread: *“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them. But that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.”* This was the institution of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In both the Passover Feast and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Jewish people were to look back and remember how God had delivered them from bondage in Egypt. At the time of the Exodus, the Passover lambs were selected and killed,

and their blood was applied to the doorposts and lintel of the houses. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the people would remove all leaven (yeast) from their houses and eat only unleavened bread. They would even sweep all the crumbs out of their houses to make sure no leaven was left! Orthodox Jews still do this today before Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. In the Bible, leaven is symbolic of corruption and evil, so the institution and observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread also incorporated this idea of the removal of evil.

In the spiritual picture (or *type*), both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread look forward to the Lord Jesus Christ and New Testament truth about how Christians are to live. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8: “... *Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*” Notice how the spiritual lessons of both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are brought out in this passage. Christ, the Lamb of God, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. Therefore - now, let’s clean out the “leaven of malice and wickedness” from our lives. Let’s live with the “unleavened bread” of sincerity and truth. What a beautiful spiritual picture!

Have you “applied the blood of the true Passover Lamb” to your life? Have you recognized Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for your sins? Have you trusted in Him as your personal Savior? Remember what God said in Exodus 12:13: “...*when I see the blood, I will pass over you.*” The Last Supper commemorated the Exodus from Egypt.

2. “The Lord’s Supper” commemorates the death of Christ.

During the celebration of the Passover Supper, the Lord Jesus instituted “The Lord’s Supper.” Both the bread and the wine would have been available on the table as part of the Passover meal. Just as the Passover meal was a memorial feast, so The Lord’s Supper is a “memorial feast.” When we celebrate The Lord’s Supper, or Communion, we remember the Lord’s death for us, as He asked us to do.

When the Lord took the bread and said, “This is my body,” and when He took the cup and said, “This is my blood,” He didn’t mean that the bread was **literally** His body, and that the wine was **literally** His blood. Remember, the Lord was sitting or standing right there **in His physical body!** He had not yet gone to the cross and given His body. He had not yet shed His blood. So it makes sense that the Lord was speaking figuratively, using the bread to **symbolize** His body and the wine to **symbolize** His blood. When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper today, it is not a “re-sacrifice” of Christ, with the bread and wine literally becoming the body and blood of Christ. No! Like Passover, the Lord’s Supper is a memorial celebration. It commemorates what the Lord has done for us on the cross, with the broken bread **representing** His body that was broken for us, and the wine **representing** His blood that was poured out for us.

The Lord's Supper is a remembrance time for all true believers, members of the Church, the worldwide Body, and the Bride of Christ. The Lord said, *"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."* So the Lord's Supper will be celebrated until the Lord returns.

The question comes up: should we use unleavened bread and fermented wine for communion today, because that's what the Lord would have used when He instituted the Lord's Supper? Or is it OK to use leavened bread and grape juice as the symbols? My own opinion is that it doesn't make a lot of difference - because the bread and wine are only **symbols**.

In verse 29, the Lord was not referring to the Lord's Supper when He said, *"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."* In this statement, the Lord meant that He was leaving them now, but He would return in the future and set up His kingdom on earth. At that time they would all be together again (and by the way, we'll be there too!) Then wine, a symbol of joy, will be filled with new meaning - the joy and blessing of the Father's kingdom. In the meantime, we celebrate the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper commemorates the death of Christ.

Practical Application

Let's sing hymns as a way of life!

"And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (v30). We don't know what hymn they sang, but it was probably some part of Psalms 115-118, the traditional Passover hymns.

Just think of the Lord **singing** at this time! He was about to be betrayed and face crucifixion, and He knew it - yet He **sang** with His disciples. It reminds us of Hebrews 12: *"For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross..."* Isn't that amazing – and wonderful?

The early Christians sang hymns when they met together. In fact, singing was a way of life for them. They sang on all occasions, in line with the exhortation with Colossians 3:16 - *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."* Paul and Silas even sang in prison (Acts 16:25)!

Singing hymns and spiritual songs was a way of life for the early believers. This is a good biblical pattern for us to follow, isn't it? Let's sing hymns as a way of life!