

December 27, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
The New Year
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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THE BEGINNING OF MONTHS 1 Corinthians 5:7-8

Friday is the first day of the new year. These things come up rather quickly these days. When we were younger, the years seemed longer because the months, weeks, and days seemed longer. Now, possibly due to the fact that we are required to be so busy, the days, weeks, and months fly by so that the new year is upon us before we grow accustomed to the old year.

It is doubtful that any of us accomplished as much as we planned to accomplish in 2015. At the end of each year as we peek in the window of the new year, we formulate plans for what we would like to do and propose goals to accomplish. Many of you already know where you will go on vacation, or you have determined purchases that you would like to make in 2016. Some of you plan to graduate from high school or college. We know that some of our young couples plan to marry in the coming year. Pat and I know that we need to leave some room to welcome a new grandchild into the world in March.

There are so many places to go, so many people to see, so much we need to accomplish. Isn't it great? That is what keeps life from becoming boring. But what do you plan to do in your relationship with your heavenly Father next year? Wise people have said things like "The archer who fails to establish a target will hit it every time." Or "The person who fails to plan plans to fail." So how do we approach the new year in fellowship with God? Do we have a plan? Is there some new level of relationship that we would like to experience through His grace?

Actually, God laid out a pretty good plan for His people to start each year walking in fellowship with Him. As God was opening the

door for His people to escape the slavery in Egypt, He established a new calendar for His people. According to God's plan, each new year was to begin with a commemoration of how He delivered His people from bondage. It was called Passover and was part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. At that very special time, *The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you" (Exodus 12:1-2).*

And so the first day of the Jewish religious calendar this year is Nisan 1 which corresponds to our April 9. What God required His people to do in conjunction with the beginning of the year is very illustrative for us. We can draw out the principles of that celebration and apply them to our own circumstances and thereby start the year with the intent of walking a closer walk with God.

The History of Passover.

Let's consider a brief introduction to the celebration called Passover (Exodus 12:1-20). In that celebration, God commanded the people to choose a special lamb. The head of the household picked out a spotless lamb on Nisan 10, which would be equivalent to our April 5. God told Moses, *"Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household" (Exodus 12:3).* Further He said, *"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats" (Exodus 12:5).* The indication seems to be that the family took the lamb into the home like a pet.

Then on Nisan 14, the head of the house killed the precious little lamb. Yikes! How cruel was that? That is what God required. At early evening in an assembly of the people, *"you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight" (Exodus 12:6).*

Having killed the lamb, they roasted the meat and ate it in a special meal. God required, *"They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it" (Exodus 12:8).* Also, because they killed the lamb, they

applied the blood of the lamb on the two doorposts and the lintel of the house. *“Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it” (Exodus 12:7).*

Another significant part of this celebration was that the whole family was involved in removing leaven from the household. In connection with that, the families observed a week long feast with the absence of leaven throughout the week. *“On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you” (Exodus 12:16).* This all began on Nisan 14 and ended on Nisan 21. *“In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening” (Exodus 12:18).*

The elements of this celebration that God commanded indicated some important principles about the memorial. First was the removal of all the leaven. Surely this was to picture the removing of sin. There is evidence especially in the New Testament that God often used leaven in this sense to picture sin. That does not give us the liberty to conclude that all references to leaven are negative. Leaven cannot consistently illustrate sin because God made it an acceptable part of the peace offering (Lev. 7:13) and of the wave offering (Lev. 23:17). Also, leaven represents the gospel in Jesus’ parable of the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 13:33). However, in this memorial, leaven represents that which should be removed. Sin is like that. Therefore, for seven days the people focused on removal of, abstaining from, all sin in their families.

A second element of importance was the lamb’s blood. This was of greatest significance. In the original setting, the lamb’s blood on the door posts caused the death angel to pass over that house. That was all part of the exodus plan. God sent an angel to kill the first born of every house where there was no lamb’s blood. God warned through Moses, *“For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD” (Exodus 12:12).*

This picture is of greatest importance. The lamb who the family chose and killed was innocent. The lamb’s blood was the only acceptable sign for deliverance from God’s judgment. God taught, *“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 no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13).* It was so important because the lamb’s blood was the only acceptable sign for deliverance from bondage in Egypt.

God intended for this to be a memorial. *“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast” (Exodus 12:14).* *“And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever” (Exodus 12:17).* God’s people were to commemorate deliverance from Egypt at the beginning of each year. God’s people were always to commemorate deliverance from God’s judgment.

Now let’s follow this memorial through the Bible and consider the people’s observance of it and also the people’s non-observance of the celebration. After the initial introduction of the Passover, the next mention of the memorial is in the context of the Wilderness of Sinai (Numbers 9:1-14). *So Moses told the people of Israel that they should keep the Passover. And they kept the Passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so the people of Israel did (Numbers 9:4-5).*

It seems quite clear from the context that this was the first new year after the exodus. By now the people had gathered at Mt. Sinai and received the law. By now it is obvious that Bezalel and company had constructed the tabernacle and it was set up (v.15). It was a good start, but we might wonder why there is no specific mention of the people keeping the memorial during the rest of the 40 years of wandering. Is it possible that the instruction God gave about the Passover celebration would apply for the future after the nation entered the Promised Land. Moses’ instruction in Deuteronomy sounds a bit like that. *You may not offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, but at the*

place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it, there you shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 16:5-6).

If that was the case, we would not be surprised to read that the next mention of the memorial is at Gilgal (Joshua 5:10-15). By the time Israel reached Gilgal, the first generation of people died in the wilderness—just as God promised they would (Joshua 5:6). Now their children have miraculously crossed the Jordan River. *The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho (Joshua 4:19).*

And lo and behold, when they got on the other side of the river, someone discovered that none of the men had been circumcised. All the men of that second generation had to be circumcised in order to carry out God’s law. *Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised (Joshua 5:5).* That is another indication that the people did not regularly follow God’s requirements while they were in the wilderness. Circumcision was a very important statute. Now that they were obedient and ceremonially clean, and before they set out to conquer the land, they observed the Passover. *And the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho (Joshua 5:9-10).*

The third mention of Passover in Israel’s history isn’t until Solomon’s reign. After the builders completed the temple, Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of the LORD that he had built before the vestibule, as the duty of each day required, offering according to the commandment of Moses for the Sabbaths, the new moons, and the three annual feasts – the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths (2 Chronicles 8:12-13). But did the people observe Passover before this time? We know that it is not likely that the people obeyed God during the period of the Judges. People who “did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 17:6) aren’t likely to be concerned about walking in fellowship with God.

After Solomon there is no mention of the Passover until Hezekiah’s and Josiah’s reigns. Hezekiah’s call to Passover was 225 years after Solomon’s Passover (2 Chronicles 30:5). *So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem, for they had not kept it as often as prescribed (2 Chronicles 30:5).* Does the silence imply that the people didn’t do Passover all those years? We know there was much rebellion among God’s people during that time. We know there were many wicked kings. By Hezekiah’s day, the northern ten tribes (Israel) had been overrun and scattered by Assyria. It is probably accurate to conclude that the words “*they had not kept it as often as prescribed*” is a bit of an understatement.

Josiah’s Passover followed Hezekiah’s call by about 100 years (2 Kings 23:21-23). The story of Josiah reveals that while workers were remodeling the very neglected Temple, they discovered the book of God’s law that prescribes the keeping of this memorial. In response to hearing God’s law, *the king commanded all the people, “Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.” For no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:21-23).* Second Chronicles 35 tells the same story.

Ezra’s Passover is the last mention of it in the Old Testament (Ezra 6:19-20). *On the fourteenth day of the first month, the returned exiles kept the Passover. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves (Ezra 6:19-20).* In context, we know that the exiles had erected a smaller version of the temple. The priests who had returned made sure the people were purified and made ready to celebrate God’s deliverance . . . again. The Old Testament gives a rather spotty record of Passover observance. I wonder if it looks like modern Christian observances of the memorial. We’re not supposed to do that, are we?

Before we answer that question, let’s consider the Passover celebration in Jesus’ day. The Bible clearly states that Jesus’ parents

celebrated the Passover. Luke recorded, “*Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover*” (Luke 2:41). But the whole celebration was tainted with the hypocrisy of Pharisees and Sadducees who used it as a money-making scheme. Nevertheless, Jesus attended Passover Feasts Himself in Jerusalem. John mentioned a couple of these. The first one is the first time Jesus cleansed the temple (John 2:13). At the second Passover (the next year probably), Jesus taught about the miracle of God giving eternal life to all who He brings to the Savior (6:4). At the third Passover, Jesus Himself was the Lamb offered for the sins of the world. John precluded that story by saying, *Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves* (John 11:55).

Passover sacrifices ended in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 because the Romans destroyed the temple, the priesthood was dismantled, and the citizens all scattered. But what does all that mean to modern believers, if anything?

The Meaning of Passover to Modern Believers.

Coming to our text in 1 Corinthians 5:7, we learn that Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. The last part of the verse states, *For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed* (v.7b). The simple statement affirms that Christ is the Passover lamb. In the Greek text, the title “Christ” is the last word in this sentence which is our text. That does not indicate unimportance, but emphasis. Everything about Paul’s argument rests on Christ. Yea, everything in eternity rests on Christ. He is unimportant to a world, a people who only use His name as a curse world. But Christ means everything to us.

The statement reminds us that He is the anointed One. That is a common meaning of the title for God the Son. It is from an Old Testament word that does refer to actual anointing. It is the word that describes how Moses anointed Aaron to be priest and how Aaron anointed other priests. The word tells how Samuel anointed Saul and David to be kings. Often these were public anointings that signified God’s choice of an individual to do His work.

So how did that work for Jesus? In eternity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit determined that God the Son would come to earth to be one of us in order to redeem us from sin. That choice was God’s anointing. If God the Son had not been chosen and had not willingly laid aside His glory to be made like a man, we would have no chance to escape eternal punishment.

And Christ, who is the Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. In God’s eternal plan, the perfect lamb would shed His blood as the only acceptable sacrifice to pay sin’s penalty. Christ brought to completion all the requirements of the ceremonial law. He accomplished what the laws could only picture. He gave meaning to all the rituals. Those thousands of bulls, goats, and lambs that were slain only illustrated the eternal plan of God. In particular, the Passover lamb that God required in the memorial to be celebrated at the beginning of each year was only a picture. That He was slain in connection with deliverance teaches that Christ was slain so that we can be delivered from sin’s penalty. He was slain so that we can be delivered from sin’s bondage over us.

The Lamb’s sacrifice is complete and never to be repeated again. Nothing can be added to Christ. No personal sacrifice can add to the value of Christ’s shed blood. No other substitute slain or offered can possibly add anything to Christ’s sacrifice.

Everyone is familiar with James McNeill Whistler’s painting titled *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1*. The average person recoils by saying, “What? That painting is Whistler’s mother.” Indeed that is how it has become known and the model posing is indeed Jim’s mom. She was a very devout woman. She was a faithful member of the Episcopal Church back in the 1800’s when it preached the gospel. She was surely special to a lot of people and especially to James. He would probably be pleased to know that his painting of mom is valued at \$30 million. Imagine how angry Whistler would be to see what some people have done to improve his famous painting of mom. There are many mock ups of the original painting on the internet and none of them are complementary. Furthermore, none of those options adds value to the original—to say the least! And none of our silly religious ideas and efforts adds anything to Christ’s sacrifice for sins. At best, they can only detract and devalue.

It is wonderful that Christ Himself is the Passover lamb. It is wonderful that He has been slain to give us eternal life. But most important is the fact that He is **our** Passover lamb. He is the only acceptable Passover lamb for the remission of sin. But the world little cares or hardly remembers the work He accomplished on the cross. Last Friday a handful of people celebrated the incarnation of the lamb who was predetermined to be slain before God created the world. At the same time, most of the world gave little thought to the astonishing plan. To us who have been delivered from sin because of Christ's sacrifice, we are very grateful. That He is our Passover lamb means that He is of greatest value to us.

If this is so, we should be quick and willing to cleanse out the old leaven (v.7a). That's what Paul admonished in the first part of the verse. *Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened (v.7a)*. Jesus died to deliver us from sin. Just as the blood of the innocent lamb splattered on the doorpost indicated identification with deliverance. The people in the house were delivered from Egypt's bondage. The people in the house were delivered from destruction. Because they were identified with the lamb's blood, they rooted out all leaven. So, too, Christ's blood delivers from sin.

If then we are truly identified with Christ's blood, we should root out sin. Did Christ' blood not pay the penalty for sin? Yes. Because we trust Christ's sacrifice, are we not forgiven sin? Yes. Then why are we responsible to discover sin and reject it? Because we live in a flesh that loves sin and naturally yields to sin. We must regularly identify sin and confess specific sins to our Savior.

Then we can celebrate the Passover without leaven (v.8). *Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (v.8)*. The new year is a good time for us to be aware of old leaven. Over the past year maybe we have developed some sinful habits. These is not necessarily bad stuff. It can be simple habits that do not encourage a godly character in us. It is typical for us to slide because of our fleshly desires stirred by a very sinful culture. It is good for us to identify those shifts away from God's character. This is what regular Bible reading and prayer accomplishes throughout the year. Maybe it is good to read a book at the beginning of the year that we

deem a bit too far to the right in order to help us identify leaven in our lives.

Having found the leaven of sinfulness in our lives, we must get rid of it. According to the text, we need to specifically identify and abandon malice, the desire to hurt someone. We need to specifically identify and abandon evil – anything that smacks of sin. At the same time, we need to identify and embrace sincerity and truth.

It is good to recall that this word of admonition from Paul is in the context of blatant sin in the congregation of believers. We need to identify and reject sinfulness in our own lives first, and then encourage others to do the same. This is how God intends for the Body to operate. The new year is a good time for us to get back on track with God. It is a good time to encourage each other to get back on track. Our Passover lamb has already been slain and has paid for sin. Identify the sin and get rid of it as we celebrate Him.