

## Is It I?

On Thursday morning of the so-called passion week two of the Lord's disciples, Peter and John, enquire of the Lord about His plans to observe the passover feast. These two appear to have realised it was not this business Judas Iscariot was absent arranging (John 13:28-30). Jesus instructs them to go into the city of Jerusalem where they will meet a man in whose house the passover should be prepared. Our Lord Jesus attended the passover feast and fully observed the obligations of the Old Testament patterns (Deuteronomy 16:1-8).

### **Make ready the passover**

Making ready the passover involved not only the preparation of the room where the meal would be held but the provision and preparation of the meal of roasted lamb and bitter herbs. The arrangements of finding and securing the upper room in which to host the feast shows the Lord's prescience and providence. It is likely Peter and John bought a lamb in the city, lambs being no doubt supplied and sold at this solemn festival both to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all who came to celebrate this feast.

### **A sacrifice and a meal**

As the law required, the two disciples would have brought the lamb to the court of the temple for slaughter. The creature's fat would be burned on the altar and its blood sprinkled upon it. Then the cooking or 'roasting it whole' would take place back in the house. This ritual, together with the supply of bitter herbs, and unleavened bread and wine, was all included in making ready the passover. In the evening, Jesus came to sit down with His twelve disciples.

### **'Christ our passover'**

The meal itself would have been a mix of formal prayers, recollected stories, and joyful celebration. Here the Children of Israel remembered their Divine deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the destruction of the firstborn in the land of the Egyptians, and the death angel passing over all houses where acceptable blood marked the doorposts and lintel. Here, too, men and women of faith glimpsed a greater deliverance, and the coming of God's appointed Messiah to redeem His people from their sins.

### **One of you shall betray me**

As Jesus and His disciples sat eating, formalities complete, the Lord Jesus announced to the gathered group, 'Verily I say unto you, one of you which eateth with me shall betray me'. The effect was immediate. Doubtless the disciples were well aware of the danger in which the Lord moved day by day. They knew of the Jews' desire to kill Jesus and took precautions to conceal their movements. That a traitor should be amongst them was serious.

### **'Exceeding sorrowful'**

However, it was sorrow above all that settled upon their hearts as Jesus spoke. Sorrow for their Friend, concern for the betrayal, sadness about the enemy among them. One by one as the implication of the Lord's words dawned on them they began to enquire who this deceiver might be and enquired of the Lord, 'Is it I?' Even Judas Iscariot, well aware he had conspired with the Jews, asked the same question. Judas, however, employed a name more honourable and respectful than all the others. 'Master, is it I?' he asked, to which the Lord replied, 'Thou has said', or 'Yes, it is you'.

### **Treachery with a kiss**

In the coming hours Judas would lead the enemies of the Lord to the Mount of Olives and into the Garden of Gethsemane where the Lord Jesus would be arrested and from where he would be taken to the chief priest and ultimately handed over to the Romans for execution. In the darkness of the garden and in the confusion of the night Judas would identify and betray his Lord with a kiss.

### **A heel lifted up**

In tomorrow's service we shall look at the significance of the passover feast, consider the circumstances of the Lord's betrayal by one of His own disciples and sympathise a little with the Lord's friends caught in the cross hairs of self-doubt and self-examination when the presence of a traitorous actor at the heart of their company is disclosed. It was a sombre lesson for the disciples to learn of Judas' deceit and betrayal. In him they witnessed personally the

fulfilment of David's words in Psalm 41:9, 'Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me'.

### **God's sovereignty and man's responsibility**

This episode in Jesus' life also teaches us a powerful truth concerning divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Lord Jesus Christ must suffer and die for the atonement of His people and the salvation of His church, as it was written and prophesied. Nevertheless, the man by whom the Son of man was betrayed was no less culpable, no less guilty, and no less answerable for the crime of condemning an innocent man and the Son of God to death. It had been better that such a one had not be born, yet born he was and for the rest of eternity Judas Iscariot will bear the punishment his act deserves.

Amen

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