

Prepared Food: Hezekiah

Maundy Thurs. – 04/06/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 2 Chron. 30:1-5, 10-13, 22b-27 Pastor Keith Besel

Introduction

✘ Tonight we begin our own three-day journey; a journey that traces our Lord Jesus' exodus from this earth, as it began on Passover with a special meal and He then led His people through death, into the depths of the earth and back again into life!

→ Each year at this time, since the year 1446 BC (somewhere around 2500 years ago) the time of Passover – now celebrated by Christians as Holy Week and Easter serves as a special memorial of the Israelite exodus out of their slavery in Egypt. In the Old Testament, God instituted this time of remembrance by His people with two feasts: the Feasts of Passover and of Unleavened Bread.

I. After years of neglect, Hezekiah celebrates Passover

✘ Unfortunately, the Judeans did not always remember the mighty acts of God as He had instructed them. King Hezekiah took the throne after his father Ahaz had reigned for 16 years; in which he led the people to practice all of the abominations that had been practiced by the pagan people from the time when they first entered the Promised Land.

→ Because of his unfaithfulness to God, Ahaz suffered military defeat and humiliation from all sides. Still 2 Chronicles 28:22 says, "In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the LORD." Even disaster crashing around him could not bring Ahaz back to God. In fact, he plundered the house of the LORD; the Temple, desecrating its furnishings and shutting its doors.

✘ So it's really quite amazing that Ahaz's son, Hezekiah began his reign at age 25 and, according to chapter 29:2, he followed his father David and "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD."

→ Right away Hezekiah began to cleanse and restore the LORD's Temple back into service. And as we heard in verse one of our text, he immediately sought to restore a faithful celebration of the Passover.

II. Issues prevented/postponed the gathering

✘ So the invitation was sent out to all of Israel and Judah to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover. Unfortunately, there were political and religious difficulties that prevented the full gathering of the twelve tribes and delayed the celebration.

→ Although Hezekiah invited the 10 tribes to the north that made up the kingdom of Israel, they had been separated from the kingdom of Judah now for centuries. In fact, they had been at war most of that time, even in the previous administration of Ahaz when his faithlessness was more in line with the ways of Israel.

→ One of the main sticking points was that Israel rejected God's designation of Jerusalem as the central place for the worship of Yahweh. Instead, they had set up high places and altars for themselves so that they wouldn't have to travel to Judah. So Hezekiah's couriers, bringing his invitation, were rejected by most of the people in Israel. Verse 10 says, "Through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, ...they laughed them to scorn and mocked them." Though a few men from the north humbled themselves and came, this was not going to be the reunion of Israel that Hezekiah had hoped for.

✘ On top of that, it became necessary for this Passover to be uniquely delayed one month. Hezekiah and his princes were informed that not enough priests were consecrated to faithfully keep the feast. Even though Numbers, chapter 9 says that an individual who is ritually unclean

or on a trip can actually celebrate the Passover in the second month, this had never been applied in such a large scale to all of the people. This would be the same as us celebrating Christmas in January or the Fourth of July in August.

→ Remember, King Ahaz had completely shut the Temple down, so the Judeans had not been celebrating the Passover every year as God had commanded. Understandably then Hezekiah was eager to hold the feast and get back on track. So, all of the preparations were hastily made. This meant that many of the people, especially the northerners who came, were ritually unclean.

III. God was pleased

✘ Even so, God was evidently pleased by this worship; passing over the ceremonial irregularities and freely giving out His grace. Verse 12 tells us, “The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD”. And verse 20 tells us that even those who came unclean were still pardoned and healed by God.

→ Yes, this was a very unique; a very special Passover in the history of Judah. Those gathered rejoiced greatly, just as in the days of Solomon (v.26) so that the prayers of the Levites (i.e. the priests) were heard not only in the Temple but verse 27 tells us that “their prayer came to [the LORD’s] holy habitation in heaven.”

→ Once again, God’s mighty acts of salvation had been returned to their rightful place – at the center of the people’s focus, as the Judeans, their Israelite brothers, and the foreigners in the land all worshiped the one true God of heaven and earth who alone had brought them out of the land of Egypt so many years before.

IV. Jesus gathers His people around His body/blood

✘ There is no question; King Hezekiah definitely led the nation to a great revival of faith at that time. However, despite his efforts to follow his father David, Hezekiah’s reforms were short-lived, because when Hezekiah’s son Manasseh took the throne, he led Judah backward in degrading and destroying Judah, Jerusalem, and the Temple as we’ll learn about tomorrow. Sadly, this is the natural cycle of rulers here on earth.

→ So, that means that Hezekiah’s greater descendent, the promised Messiah, will have to do more. And as we all know, He does do more. Instead of thousands of bulls and sheep, Jesus offers His very own blood as a ransom for the souls of all the earth. The spotless Passover Lamb that He offers is His very own human flesh. On top of that, Jesus needs no consecrated priest, for He is Himself the highest, holiest Priest of all; and that in spite of the fact that the Jewish priests and leaders thought He had been defiled because He had entered Pilate’s headquarters (cf Jn. 18:28).

→ But you see, Jesus knew, and He came to teach them that it was not an outward purity that mattered. It was His perfect purity as the unblemished Lamb of God. So Jesus had no need to delay a month; He was completely ready; He was consecrated by the Father and the Holy Spirit to save His people from all sin.

✘ So, Luke 22:15 tells us that, as the hour drew near for Jesus to give His life, He said to His disciples, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer”. Although He sent Peter and John ahead to prepare the meal, Jesus makes it clear that He had already done the preparation; offering them His own body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

→ It was there in that “Last Supper” before Jesus’ death that He changed the Passover forevermore. No longer would it be a memorial day and feast to remember the final plague and the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. Instead, Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Lk.

22:19). Now, according to God's plan, Jesus is the one who frees all of God's people from their bondage to sin, death and the devil.

✘ Yes, as the ultimate Son of David, Jesus gathers His flock from around the entire world, because His sacrifice paid the price for all sin – past, present and future. And so, His invitation goes far beyond Jerusalem; much farther than just the kingdom of Israel. Jesus sends His invitation to the ends of the earth so that all nations and all kings might come to worship Him on the throne and be fed in His sacramental feast with the Bread of Life.

➔ That's Jesus' desire; that's His full intent. But like Hezekiah, Jesus' invitation is not received by all people, is it? On Holy Week, Jesus too was mocked and scorned – not by the Samaritans, but by His own people! He, the King, came to Judah, to the temple in Jerusalem, and His own did not receive Him.

➔ Yet mercifully His invitation spreads beyond His own; going near and far; even right here to you and your children; to slave and free. His glory has been made known to the nations, and John 1:12 declares, "to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." Yes, this very night, on Holy Thursday, people around the world; from every nation and tribe are gathered into one family of believers. With one heart, this family of faithful believers is cleansed by the Spirit of God; worshiping the one true Father who is over all, through all, and in all.

✘ You; yes you are here in this place because the Son of God invited you to worship, not in an earthly temple in Jerusalem, but in Spirit and truth in His Holy Christian Church. The earthly Jerusalem is a physical and historical place. But Jesus told us in Matthew 18:20 that true worship happens "where two or three are gathered in [His] name." Yes, The Passover is still celebrated today wherever Jesus' flesh is eaten and His blood is drunk among believers who faithfully teach and confess His Holy Word.

➔ Just as He directed the disciples to the place where the Passover would be prepared that holy night in Jerusalem, so He has prepared the feast before us here tonight. And He does not want us just to receive His Passover gifts of forgiveness, salvation and grace once a year, but regularly and often because, well – we sin regularly and often, don't we?

➔ As we come often to His table, we not only remember Jesus as our God, but we remember Him giving His body and shedding His blood on the cross in our place; to give us freedom and life by His sacrifice. As Paul says in our Epistle Reading in 1 Corinthians 11:26, every time we approach His holy table, we make a public proclamation of Him and His death and all that He has accomplished in His death until He returns in glory at the end of time.

V. Jesus eagerly invites us to His table

✘ And lest we never be found to scorn or mock our Lord Jesus and His invitation as those men from Israel did Hezekiah, dear Christians, we can never think that we are the ones hosting this meal that we call "Holy Communion"; nor that you are performing some great act of obedience to gain God's grace; nor even that you or I in any way deserve what is offered and consumed at this altar. It has always been, and always will remain the Lord Jesus Himself who is both the host and the meal itself. Therefore, as Paul says in our Epistle Reading, this is not a meal that Christ intends for just anybody and everybody to receive without first understanding what is offered and what is received. He is clear in verse 27 that His gift of body and blood can be received "in an unworthy manner"; as verse 29 says, thereby "drinking judgement on himself".

➔ So it is required by God, not man, that we administer His Holy Supper according to His direction in Scripture, not according to what is popular at the time, so that it will be received

rightly, as Christ's gift of grace; received by one who also has His gift of humble faith and thereby knows that he/she is receiving an undeserved, yet glorious meal.

→ Yes, as Jesus has promised, this is His true body and His true blood, given and shed on the cross for us poor sinners, through which He actually feeds us true forgiveness from sin and strengthens us in body and soul to live as His children each day in His Church.

→ Have no doubt, dear Christians, this is Jesus' most earnest desire; to feed you with His grace in His Holy Supper over and over, according to His intended manner and understanding from His Word. May it be so among us always, so that you and I might joyfully and humbly and eternally receive His feast of grace and confess Him as our King and Savior forevermore. Amen.