

### Passover

Do you find it hard to remember? Most of us tend to forget things over time, don't we? It's not just a trait of those getting older. It's a trait of our frantic pace that squeezes everything out apart from the immediate activity. So, we all tend to forget things. It's hard to remember.

We all have different ways to try to remember various things. Some people write on their hand. Robyn and I are always competing as to which is the best way. I rely on the electronic reminder in the iphone. She relies on the written note. She's always losing hers!

But, 2 weeks ago - I forgot my mothers birthday. It was on my computer calendar - I just didn't see it. It was one of those days - an early breakfast, followed by back-to-back meetings and appointments all day, and then a Board meeting that night. It was just one of those days. I forgot - my mothers birthday. She still remembers that I forgot her birthday! mmm, the problem is that she will remember for years to come.

Sometimes we forget things we never think we would ever forget. Robyn and I still debate whether Arwen's first word was 'Daddy' or 'Nana.' I remember it as 'daddy.' She remembers 'nana.' Her memory obviously isn't as good as mine. ;-)

But, it's easy to forget things that we think we would never forget. Robyn and I often ask parents how they coped with infants and pre-schoolers. The normal answer we hear is 'It's so long ago now that I really can't remember.' We're going - 'how can you forget the chaos and stress - I mean 'sacredness' - of that period?' But, it's easy to forget things that we think we would never forget.

There are things that happen in life and at the time we believe that whatever happens, this experience, this belief, this idea that we now have will define us from here on in. But, it's easy for that event to be relegated to some dusty room in the museum of our mind - unless . . . unless we intentionally go through some of these mental museum pieces.

I'm trying to do that more. When I'm back home in my home-town, Havelock North, I like to walk back through my old school and remember the innocence of those days. Life, at least for me, was uncomplicated and simple. I try to go for that walk down memory lane because I find it helpful to remember the simplicity of life back then.

Another day I make sure I remember is the anniversary of my marriage -14<sup>th</sup> December. As part of that day, I might listen to the song that was played when Robyn and I got married. Doing so sends me back to that day. It's not just a mental rehearsal. I find my heart starts beating a faster as I recall the awe of seeing my bride walk down

the aisle. The song brings back the way I felt on that significant day of my life almost 14 years ago that still affects who I am today.

I make sure I remember hard times as well. I take time to remember the anniversary of those I have loved dearly who are no longer here. I go through cards or emails received from friends in these painful moments and go through precious reminders that cast my mind back to the details of those days. Though painful times, they affect who I am.

We do the same thing as a culture on Anzac Day - coming up in 4 weeks time. [Since it falls on a Sunday, we have a special service designed this year.] There's a phrase we often use on that day - "lest (finish it), we forget." If we forget what happened, we have lost something... If we forget, we lose something about our identity and the cost of freedom... If we forget, it's like the sacrifice that was made isn't important to us. So, we take a day to remember. Lest we forget.

Why do we do such things? Because we know that such events - whether painful or pivotal - define us. Whether it's a birthday, an anniversary, a memorial day, an Anzac Day, we ensure we take time to remember because without such an occasion we are prone to forget, we are prone to push such painful and pivotal occasions to the side - even though it is these significant events in our life that make us who we are and how we tick. These things re-orient us, take us out of our present complacency or busyness and return us to the experiences that have shaped who we are. They reset in us the values we uphold. They remind us of our identity. So, we set aside such days as significant to remember and to cast our mind and heart back to that time.

Today, we see a feast that God set up for His people in order for them *to remember*. We've seen some of these feasts and celebrations in this series. The one we're looking at today might be somewhat familiar to some of you but I want us to return there and see what's really going on for what happens here transcends time and space. As the people look back to this event, it is meant to be something that all the people of God - us included - look back to and re-enact as part of our history. Though this feast happened 4000 years ago, it is something in our history as the people of God and defines who we are. We need to remember what this is all about. Our identity is wrapped up in this feast known simply as *Passover*.

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This event was a significant occasion that provided a new beginning point.

*<sup>1</sup> While the Israelites were still in the land of Egypt, the LORD gave the following instructions to Moses and Aaron: <sup>2</sup> "From now on, this month will be the first month of the year for you.*

So, whatever this feast was about was now the new beginning point for them as a nation. This event will now begin the calendar. The new first month. It's called Abib (13:4) - later changed to Nisan which is of Babylonian origin. This deliverance is a new beginning for the people. Every time they look at their calendar, they will remember

that it is God who gave them a fresh start. It is God who gave them a clean slate. The Exodus that we're about to see is about a whole new beginning.

Now, events in our lives might not set a new calendar but they do begin new periods for us, don't they. I celebrate my anniversary because it *began* a new era for me as a married man.

I think what we're looking at today can be a defining point for all of us. We're going to see something in this feast that affects our identity, what makes us who we are as the people of God. This might be a defining point for you to even respond to God today. Last week, we had people respond to an invitation to come forward. You don't need to wait for an appeal. You can respond even while I'm talking to God today. If something I say is something you need today, you can just pray where you are and let God know that's what you want for your own life. Passover was and is a defining moment for the people of God.

Various things happened during this feast that helped the mind go back. The goal was that everyone would experience it – even though they weren't there. It was a very tangible thing. The Mishnah (Jewish commentary of Jesus' time) says, *"In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt."* (10:5). So, the things that happen during this feast are like going through a memory box, or playing a particular from your wedding day – all designed to jog the memory banks and experience things in very tangible ways. This table is set up with a standard Passover menu – or the 'Passover Seder Plate.' Some of this is mentioned in the passage in front of us. Much of it was appropriate added to over time. It is all loaded with imagery and symbolism.

There are traditional items on the Seder Plate that I want to describe as we go. There is food and drink to enjoy as part of the feast. [10:30 – *invite some guests to join me at the table*]

- **Maror:** On the plate was either horseradish or romaine lettuce. (try it). what do you notice? It's bitter. It symbolises the bitterness and harshness of the slavery, which the Jews endured in Egypt.
- **Charoset:** Charoset is traditionally made from chopped nuts, grated apples, cinnamon, and sweet red wine. (taste/discuss). It's a sweet, brown mixture. It represents the mortar used by the Jewish slaves to build the storehouses of Egypt. Life back then was bitter and tough. It was all about building for Egyptians.
- **Karpas:** A vegetable like parsley or celery other than bitter herbs, which is dipped into salt water at the beginning of the Seder. The dipping of a simple vegetable into salt water (which represents tears) mirrors the pain felt by the Jewish slaves in Egypt.
- **Beitzah:** A roasted egg – which apparently tastes just the same as a hard-boiled egg but takes a lot longer than boiling in today's economy! The egg was a

symbol of mourning as eggs are the first thing served to mourners after a funeral. It brings various ideas to mind. 1) symbol of strength. It gets harder as it is roasted/boiled. It is not as fragile. Suffering brings depth and strength to people. 2) hope of new life. ) life cycle (funerals had other round foods with the egg to remind them of the cycle of life. Like their ancestors/faith fathers, they too would die, and await the hope of the resurrection.

- Even the way they ate all this was symbolic.

<sup>11</sup> *"These are your instructions for eating this meal: Be fully dressed, wear your sandals, and carry your walking stick in your hand. Eat the meal with urgency, for this is the LORD's Passover. – Exodus 12:11*

Back then . . . have your shoes on. Have everything you need for the journey into the wilderness. Be ready to go for as soon as it's over, you're free from slavery and need to flee!

All of these symbols said to the people '**REMEMBER – God rescued us from a bitter past!**'

You can imagine the Israelites gathering hundreds of years later, now in the Promised land, in homes; a generation that never experienced slavery. They take Passover and taste the bitter herbs, see the mortar (*Charoset*), eat in haste, and remember that their identity as slaves. At one time, they had lived in bitter conditions but God rescued them.

What would it do to them? For one, it would snap them out of complacency. With luxuries of life around them and good health, it would help them remember that God is the one who provided this ...; Not only that, but if they were in tough times, it would help them remember God rescued them from a bitter past and can/will do so again.

This is something all of us need to remember, isn't it?

1. When things go well, we take it for granted. We easily forget the goodness of God in providing it all for us.
2. Then tough times come, as they always do, we forget that we've been here before. We've experienced tough times before. God rescued us then. God will rescue us again.

So - '**REMEMBER PASSOVER – God rescued us from a bitter past!**'

After eating all this, one of the family would participate in the ritual and ask the famous Passover question - *Ma Nishtana* — *"Why is this night different from all other nights?"*

At that point, the father of the family would retell the story of what happened in the Exodus, and the way God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land. So, let's look at some of the details in this story. *Exodus 12:3ff* . . .

<sup>3</sup> *Announce to the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each family must choose a lamb or a young goat for a sacrifice, one animal for each household. <sup>4</sup> If a family is too small to eat a whole animal, let them share with another family in the neighborhood. Divide the animal according to the size of each family and how much they can eat. <sup>5</sup> The animal you select must be a one-year-old male, either a sheep or a goat, with no defects.*

So, each family was to find a perfect lamb. The best they had. The whole animal was to be consumed. If you're family was small, join with another to make sure that you can eat and consume everything. Nothing was to be wasted.

Notice how long they are to have this animal in their house:

<sup>6</sup> *“Take special care of this chosen animal until the evening of the fourteenth day of this first month. Then the whole assembly of the community of Israel must slaughter their lamb or young goat at twilight.*

So, from the 10<sup>th</sup> day to the 14<sup>th</sup> day, this animal is in their care. What happens if you have to care for a lamb with the whole family for 4 days? You get attached to it. The kids name the lamb 'lambie' or 'woolie.' They feed lambie. They walk lambie. They sing to lambie. They pray for lambie at night . . .

Then, you, as the strong one in the family have to go slaughter little lambie. You can't pretend it's not lambie. It seems like the whole family is meant to identify with lambie. It sounds cruel, doesn't it?

They are not just going down to the local supermarket and getting some lamb in plastic wrap. They are experiencing the brutal reality that their lambie is now butchered.

It gets pretty graphic. Let's keep reading...

<sup>7</sup> *They are to take some of the blood and smear it on the sides and top of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the animal. <sup>8</sup> That same night they must roast the meat over a fire and eat it along with bitter salad greens and bread made without yeast. <sup>9</sup> Do not eat any of the meat raw or boiled in water. The whole animal—including the head, legs, and internal organs—must be roasted over a fire. <sup>10</sup> Do not leave any of it until the next morning. Burn whatever is not eaten before morning.*

Here's the story behind it . . .

<sup>21</sup> *Then Moses called all the elders of Israel together and said to them, “Go, pick out a lamb or young goat for each of your families, and slaughter the Passover animal. <sup>22</sup> Drain the blood into a basin. Then take a bundle of hyssop branches and dip it into the blood. Brush the hyssop across the top and sides of the doorframes of your houses. And no one may go out through the door until morning. <sup>23</sup> For the LORD will pass through the land to strike down the Egyptians. But when he sees the blood on the top and sides of the*

*doorframe, the LORD will pass over your home. He will not permit his death angel to enter your house and strike you down.*

[Discuss 10<sup>th</sup> Plague/ Pass-over]

Lambie is now on their plate! They need to eat Lambie. There was a point in all of this. Lambie's death is what saves them.

If Lambie's blood was not on the doorpost, the firstborn son in the Israelite family would die. Lambie was providing salvation, saving him, from the death that all the Egyptians firstborn sons and animals were about to experience. I'm sure that not just a few firstborn sons and mums in Israel kept going outside to ensure that the blood was still smeared on the doorframe.

Lambie's death provided them with life. Lambie's death is what provided them freedom.

As the people took the lamb and ate it each year, they remembered the original Passover. They realised a key lesson - **Our life comes through another's death.**

We are unable to free ourselves. We are unable to save ourselves. We need the sacrifice of another in order to be free and to live.

The New Testament picks up on this. The night before Jesus was crucified, Jesus took a meal with his disciples. It was the Passover meal. He was probably celebrating it a day early, knowing what was about to come. During that meal, we read . . .

*“When he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.” – Matthew 26:27-29*

Jesus brings new meaning to the basic elements in the Passover. He will say the bread is his body. This wine is his blood.

Then, the next day, the actual day of Passover, Jesus died. Mark is deliberate in even telling us the timing of his death – 3pm in the afternoon. That was the actual time that Israelites sacrificed the Passover lamb. We read earlier that this happened at “at twilight.” Orthodox Jews understood the Hebrew phrase behind that word to mean as 'between the evenings' - between midday (when the sun begins to go down) and sunset – so about 3pm. That's the understanding the Mishnah, the Jewish commentary has. Jesus dies right at the moment Jewish households were killing the Passover lamb they would have on their tables. As such, God is reminding us – Jesus is our Passover Lamb.

In case we missed it, the Apostle Paul couldn't be any clearer when he says in 1 Corinthians 5, *‘Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.’ (1 Cor 5:7).*

Our life comes through his death. Our freedom comes through his death.

Whatever you have done, no matter how bad it is – you can still experience life. You no longer have to be in bondage to your sin or shame...

Every time, we take communion, every time we take this cup, we remember Jesus as our Passover Lamb. *We remember that our life, our freedom, comes through his death.*

We're going to take that now. Take it during this song. – ***Lead me to the cross.***

III. There's one other element on the table that has something to teach us. Something that we need to remember. It's in this bread.

Passover led immediately into another feast called the feast of unleavened bread. During that time, the people ate only unleavened bread, bread without yeast.

Here's what we read:

*<sup>15</sup> For seven days the bread you eat must be made without yeast. On the first day of the festival, remove every trace of yeast from your homes. Anyone who eats bread made with yeast during the seven days of the festival will be cut off from the community of Israel. . .*

Later, in the chapter we read,

*<sup>34</sup> The Israelites took their bread dough before yeast was added. They wrapped their kneading boards in their cloaks and carried them on their shoulders . . .  
<sup>37</sup> That night the people of Israel left Rameses and started for Succoth. . . .<sup>39</sup> For bread they baked flat cakes from the dough without yeast they had brought from Egypt. It was made without yeast because the people were driven out of Egypt in such a hurry that they had no time to prepare the bread or other food.*

The reason they ate flat bread was because they had no time to allow yeast to rise.

Over time, the Bible picks up on the image of yeast and makes it a symbol of evil and sin. It's an appropriate image, isn't it? Something might just seem a small thing at times has a way of contaminating the whole dough and affecting now just us but the whole community. Moral yeast – sin – contaminates. It's needs to be cleared out.

At a certain stage in the meal, the children go around the house in a hunt for yeast. It's like an Easter Egg hunt – but for yeast instead of eggs.

The reason is that they want to make sure their house is clear of leaven.

Jesus picked up the bread, the night before he died. We read, *“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” (Matthew 26:26, NIV).*

Jesus took the simply unleavened bread at Passover and linked it to himself. He gave us a new feast of communion. One of the things that should happen at communion is some self-reflection.

The New Testament picks up on this image.

*“Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast — as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.”*

- 1 Cor 5:6-8

We need to remember Christ, our Passover Lamb, but also remember that moral yeast contaminates – so clear it out.

What might we need to deal with? The Psalmist says, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart. test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” - Psalm 139:23-24.*

In the NT, we read *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. - Titus 2:12-14*

As we take communion, it's an appropriate time for a spring clean out on the inside.

As they remembered Passover, they remembered that **Moral yeast contaminates – so clear it out.**

*Illustration: There's a site in San Antonio that is the most popular tourist site in Texas. It's the Alamo. The battle of the Alamo (February 23 – March 6, 1836) was a pivotal event in the Texas Revolution. Following a 13 day siege, Mexican troops launched an assault on the Alamo, in San Antonio, Texas. All but two defenders were killed, including Davy Crockett. Santa Anna's perceived cruelty during the battle inspired many Texans—both Texas settlers and adventurers from the United States—to join the Texian Army. There was a cry that set the minds and the hearts of the people back and challenged them to action. It was simple - ‘Remember the Alamo!’*

Today, we need to *Remember the Passover*. In the midst of the pace of society that can push out significant things we need to remember, let us not forget. Remember the Passover.

1. **REMEMBER – God rescued us from a bitter past'**
2. **REMEMBER - Our life comes through another's death.**
3. **REMEMBER - Moral yeast contaminates – so clear it out.**