

ANIMAL TALES: A LAMB'S EXCHANGE

(I Corinthians 11:23b-26)

4.1.21 – Maundy Thursday

Description: *A lamb was the focal point of ancient Israel's annual "Passover" observation in which a spotless, perfect lamb was sacrificed for the sins of the people — foreshadowing both the role and the act that Christ completed on the cross for us.*

INTRODUCTION

We are continuing to let some select animals from God's perfect creation tell the story of the most important week in human history. Last Sunday we listened to Kye, the donkey who provided the ride for Jesus of Nazareth during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Tonight, we will be hearing the story of another animal — a one-year-old lamb, a lamb without spot or blemish, with no flaw whatsoever.

During a time such as Passover, which was the backdrop for this story, the population of Jerusalem swelled greatly with Jews coming literally from all over the world to celebrate a remembrance that God had decreed. It is thought that possibly as many as two and a half million people were now in and around Jerusalem. Because of that number, it is estimated that maybe as many as a quarter million sheep would be sacrificed during this time. But now it is time for somebody else to give us the details of the story. But first, **let's begin with a moment of prayer.**

TEXT (I Corinthians 11:23b-26)

Greetings! If you're waiting for an introduction, like a name, you're not going to get one. I am just one of millions of sheep who have come and gone over the centuries. And you know, maybe it's just as well that I have no name, that I'm just kind of anonymous. Because the story I am going to relate to you is not so much about who or what we are, but what our Creator has privileged us to become. This is a story that I heard from my mom and dad, who heard it from their mom and dad, who heard it from their mom and dad, and so on, and so on, and so on, all the way back to the first mom and dad in the original Israelite flock — who heard this story from their Creator.

Many, many centuries ago, my ancestors were being herded and shepherded by a people called the Israelites. Now there was nothing special about them from any other people in the world — except one incredible thing: They had been chosen by God to be a people of His own possession; in other words, they were to belong to Him: “[Y]ou are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be His treasured possession” — Moses, Deuteronomy 14:2. Now notice I said that they had been “chosen by God.” It seemed all people groups had gods they had chosen, but the God of the Israelites was the one true God, I mean, the one and only. And He had chosen them.

Now at this time in their history, they were basically being held captive in a place called Egypt, working as slaves. This had been going on for hundreds of years. But finally, in God's perfect timing, and with God's perfect leader in place, a man named Moses, he brought them out of Egypt to bring them to a “Promised Land” he had pledged to them.

How did he bring them out, you say? Did the Egyptians just get tired of trying to figure out things to have them do? Not exactly. Egypt's leader, their "pharaoh," had no intention of ever letting them go. So, God had to persuade him of his power with displays of might that no one had ever seen before. They were called plagues, and fully nine of them had been sent on the land — some on both Israelites and Egyptians, but several on the Egyptians only. I've always heard that, after witnessing some samples of God's power, most Egyptians were more than ready to let the Israelites go — but not Pharaoh.

Finally, God gave Moses one final message to give to Pharaoh: Let God's people go, or the firstborn son of everybody in Egypt, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh himself to the firstborn son of the lowliest slave, even the firstborn male of all of Egypt's cattle, would die, all in one evening. But God also provided a test of faith that the Israelites needed to do — a sign that would show that they believed in God no matter what, and that they trusted Him to the point of complete obedience. Among other things, they were commanded to slaughter a lamb — somebody just like me — one for every Israelite family. And they were commanded that those lambs had to be perfect: one year old, without a spot or blemish.

Now my mom must have seen that I was getting scared so, even as my dad continued telling the story, she came and stood really close to me. Don't tell anybody, but I was glad she was there. Anyway, I asked my dad, "So what did they do with the lambs after they died?"

My dad said, "They took the blood from each lamb and they smeared it on the door frames of their houses — across the top and down the sides."

I looked at my mom. "Why'd they do that?" She looked at me with the prettiest eyes in the world before saying, "Just listen, little one. Your dad will explain it."

And he did: "They had been commanded by God to do that so that the coming plague wouldn't affect them. You see, God was going to send one of His angels — an angel of death — to take the life of every firstborn son in the entire land of Egypt — from the most important to the least, and even the firstborn of the cattle."

I still didn't understand. "So, what does that have to do with the lambs and their blood smeared on the door frames?"

*He said, "When the angel of death came to a house where he saw the blood on the door frames, he would 'pass over' that house, leaving the firstborn son in that home alive and well. When he came to a house where he saw no blood, where no lamb's life had been given, then the life of the firstborn son in that family was taken. As the story has come down to us, there was not one Egyptian house in all the land where someone had not died: **Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead — Exodus 12:30.** So even though a lamb died, his blood saved the life of another. You might even say the lamb exchanged his blood, his life, so that another might live. After all, life is in the blood."*

All of a sudden, I could feel myself understanding. "So Dad, in a way, that kind of makes us like a, a, a hero — right? 'Cause the blood of the lamb is saving someone who would die without it. Isn't that what the blood means?"

“That’s right,” said my father, “but there’s more — so much more.” I was waiting for him to continue. But he paused, as if trying to gather all his thoughts, like this was something really important — maybe more important than anything he had ever told me. “You see, as it’s been handed down to us for all these hundreds and hundreds of years, what each lamb was doing, every time this Passover was remembered, each time a lamb died, it was a foreshadowing, like a preview, of something that would be happening someday in the future — like what happened to all these lambs, only far more amazing.”

He paused again. Wow, I thought; this must be a really big deal. Then he continued: “Our Creator desired to save people from much more than just physical death. You see, He had created people, just like He created us, my son. But He created people to have a wonderful relationship with Him. But one day the first people decided they didn’t want that. They wanted their own relationships — which had nothing to do with God. I think they call it ‘sin.’ Anyway, while their kids and their kids and then their kids became more and more sinful, God wasn’t changing, not a bit; He continued to be perfect. And now He couldn’t be in a relationship with them. He refused to be around anyone who had anything to do with sin.”

I interrupted. “You mean He could never have a relationship with anybody?”

“Not quite,” my father patiently continued. “You see, God had a plan, an idea that would provide a means of ‘pass over’ for everybody, and provide a means of restoring the relationships that were lost.”

“For everybody?” I exclaimed. “How could He do that? Do you know how many lambs that would take? That would be like, like every lamb from every flock in the world! Who’d even be left?” I was feeling anxious.

But then my dad quietly spoke to me in a way that told me that there was nothing to worry about, that everything was under control. “But what if there was a lamb, one very special lamb, who would give His life, would give His blood, for everybody?”

“But how could one lamb die for everybody’s ‘pass over’?”

“Well, as God put this plan together, His Son came up to Him and said, ‘I’ll do it, Father; I’ll be the lamb. I’ll be the “lamb of God” who takes away the sin of the world. I’ll be the lamb that offers an eternal “pass over” for everyone who believes. After all, I am without spot or blemish, too.’ So, my son, every time a lamb dies during this remembrance of what God did in Egypt, it’s also a preview of what the ‘lamb of God’ would be offering to do for everybody in the whole world.”

I could hardly believe my ears. “So dad, you mean, in a way, I could represent God’s . . . Son, the Son of our Creator? Wow! What an amazing gift — that a lamb like me could represent a lamb like Him!”

So, what a story we’ve had to tell — all the lambs who have by their death and their blood given everybody a preview, a picture, of what the Lamb of God, our Creator’s very own Son, would do for each person in the world. We represent blood given to save everybody.

But if I understand it right, that also gives every person who believes in that blood, who’s been saved by that blood, a chance to represent the Creator as well — by means of a changed life, a new life, now lived not for themselves but for the Creator Himself. What an amazing

Lamb will be given. I hope that story never grows old for you. I know it'll never grow old for me. Good-night!

APPLICATION/CONCLUSION

Yes; what an amazing Lamb indeed! And what better way to remember that amazing Lamb and the incredible work he has accomplished for us than to remember the New Covenant that Christ created, based on the blood He would be shedding on the cross that would be the foundation of that New Covenant. Paul passed on the Lord's instructions to him, which he in turn communicated to the church at Corinth. In four parts, he shared the process of what today we call communion:

Part 1 — Confession and Repentance: Now a huge part of taking part in communion is confession and repentance, becoming “clean” before the Lord. Paul explained it like this: *[W]hoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup — Paul, I Corinthians 11:27-28.*

Part 2 — Scriptural Meditation: What Christ was about to do on the cross was foretold by the prophet Isaiah some 700 years before the actual events, when through the power and grace of God it was revealed:

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces He was despised, and we held Him in low esteem. Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered Him punished by God, stricken by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all — Isaiah 53:3-6.

Part 3 — Taking of the Bread: *The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me” — Paul, I Corinthians 11:23b-24.*

Part 4 — Taking of the Cup: *In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes — Paul, I Corinthians 11:26*

Benediction: *The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace — God speaking, Numbers 6:24-26.*

God bless, everybody!