

Text: Exodus 12:14-20, 24-28

Title: "Christianity, our Passover commission"

Time: 10/11/2020 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I thank the Lord for his provision in our home for my children to go to college. Those of you with college tuition in your annual household budget understand that this category is uniquely expensive. So Maureen and I have paid the college bill for Brandon, Kara, and now Kent, but we did so with the stipulation that we wanted them to work hard at their studies and not take advantage of the blessing of having their bill paid by Mom and Dad.

To enforce our stipulation, I came up with the principle that I only paid full price for A's. For B's my kids owed me \$100 each, for C's \$200, and for D's \$300. Thankfully, we never had to calculate a fine beyond that. So we were willing to do for our kids what they could not do for themselves – pay for their college, but we required that they do what they could do for themselves as part of the deal.

In Egypt on this night prior to the morning of the exodus, God was about to do something for the Israelites that they could not do for themselves. He was going to save them from their bondage and make them a new nation. But prior to doing so, God wanted them to understand that He had a Passover statute or responsibility for them to fulfill as well. There was something they could do in view of the exodus, and God told them they must do so (v. 14, "ordinance"; v. 24, "ordinance"; vv. 25-26 "service").

In this responsibility, God begins to give the Jews biblical Judaism. In that gift they are given a set of visible institutions and tasks that help to define their mission in the

world to make God's invisible truth visible. We might say that the details of biblical Judaism are Israel's Passover commission, because they begin with the Passover.

In the New Testament era, the Lord Jesus has given Christians a set of visible institutions and tasks that help to define our mission in the world as well, which we call biblical Christianity. These institutions and tasks make God's invisible truth visible in our age, and they began with the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ.

Because the gift of biblical Judaism and the gift of biblical Christianity were given by the same God of the Bible, they are similar in many ways as different visible expressions of the same invisible truth. This commission they share.

Therefore, just as we have followed Paul in understanding that Christ is our Passover sacrifice and our Passover propitiation, so we also learn much from the Jewish ministry of the Passover celebration about what are our own responsibilities as Christians of today's New Testament era. This is what I mean by my message title today: "Christianity, our Passover commission." I want us to see four things about the commission Israel received to celebrate the Passover that will help us understand how we can better fulfill our commission as New Testament Christians during the church age.

I. The Passover commission is unchanging from one generation to another, and so is our Christian commission (vv. 14, 17b, 24-27).

Illustration: I know from personal experience that great pain can come to parents when kids fail to take good care of a precious family heirloom. My grandmother gave my

Mom a beautiful large hand-crafted vase she had purchased in Arizona after she had moved there because of the bone cancer she suffered from. That vase was a precious heirloom representing not only my Grandmother's love, but also her suffering, which should have been passed down from generation to generation in the Hobi family. It would have been except for the fact that my brother and I played football one afternoon in the living room where the vase was. My brother broke the vase after I tackled him, and that was the end of that precious heirloom, and nearly the end of my brother and I as well.

Application: The Lord is clear about the preciousness of the Passover ceremony and the way its truth needed to be passed down unashamed from one generation to the next. It was not that lambs or their blood or unleavened bread or bitter herbs had any magical powers, but rather that they stood for the salvation that parents want their children to understand and experience for themselves. "What does this mean?" is the right question for each new generation to ask the one that has gone on before (v. 26). Because salvation never changes, the Passover service was not to be reinvented with every new generation to suit the particularities of the spirit of their age. The meaning was the same, and the service was supposed to stay the same too.

Nor should our service of the Lord in the New Testament era change with the changing culture around us today. Some have gotten the idea that Christianity must change with each new generation to stay relevant to the modern era or culture. That is a false idea (see Heb. 13:7-9; "conversation" = "specific applications").

We have a trust committed to us to pass the faith once delivered to the saints unchanged to the next generation that

follows us. With the Apostle John, we confess that we have no greater joy than to see our children walk in truth, the same joy we tried to give our parents in the faith (3 John 4). We are a bridge from our grandparents' Christianity to the Christianity of our grandchildren. To the degree one is unrecognizable to the other, we have failed. It is God, not the changing culture of generations, who gives definition to the nature of true worship, and those definitions are the same from generation to generation. One guiding principle that undergirds the immutability of true worship generation after generation is found in verse 27 – bowing or reverence.

II. The Passover commission creates an assembly with a twofold mission, and so does our Christian commission (vv. 16, 19).

Illustration: In his book *The Triumph of Vulgarity*, the author Robert Patterson, whom I do not believe was a believer, wrote about the way that pantheism has caused a triumph of the common or the vulgar in our culture today. He noted that electronic meetings have contributed to this loss of the transcendent: "The genuine event no longer exists in distinct place or time, secure from duplication in its mysterious communion with transcendent truth and beauty. The electric event exists everywhere and now."

Patterson had never heard of COVID-19 or doing church through Zoom meetings 33 year ago. But what he says about what happens to a meeting of believers when physical gathering, in a time and place with the transcendent presence of the Savior, is exchanged for recorded electronic interface cannot be ignored in our situation today. Doing church that way makes it just another event that along with all other recorded media exists everywhere and now at my beck and call. It vulgarizes the meeting, robbing it of its special transcendence in time and place.

Application: It is clear from our text that God did not have Zoom calls or recorded events in mind when it came to the celebration of the Passover. This was to be a celebration of seven days of living together, eating together, and worshipping together. The seven days are an echo of the creation week, and they symbolize the truth we find in Isa. 43:15-21, that the Lord is the Creator of Israel, a people for His praise.

In our passage, the Lord uses two words that not only tell us that they were to physically assemble in a special time and place, but that also tell us what their twofold mission was as a Passover assembly. The first term is *holy convocation* (v. 16), and the second term is *congregation* (v. 19).

The word *convocation* is an excellent translation of the Hebrew word. A *convocation* (*con* – together + *voco* – to call) is an assembly that has been summoned together for a specific unified purpose. It is very much like the Greek word we translate *church* (*ekklesia* – called-out or summoned assembly). This summoned assembly is holy because it is a meeting with the Holy One of Israel, the nation's Creator.

In the context of the ministry of the local church, Jesus promises us today that where two or three are gathered in His name, there He is in their midst (Matt. 18:20). And so we gather to be with Him and worship Him in a holy way.

The second word *congregation* translates a Hebrew word that is often translated *witness* (as in Josh. 24:27). It means *congregation*, but it includes the idea that this congregation is a body of witnesses with a testimony to the world.

As a local church, we too are a body of witnesses (Acts 1:8, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the

uttermost part of the earth.") *Witnesses* was Jesus's word for the very first local church in Jerusalem, and as the word of God, disciples, and churches have multiplied, these congregations are still commissioned to be His witnesses today.

So prioritizing the gathering of God's people is an indispensable responsibility when it comes to both our worship and our witness for Christ. Hebrews 10:21-25 makes this very clear ("draw near" = worship; "hold fast our confession" and "provoke unto love and good works" = witness). These are the two missions we must fulfill as a local church by faithful gathering - worship and witness, loving Christ and then making Him known.

III. The Passover commission cannot tolerate leaven, nor can our Christian commission (vv. 15, 17-20).

Application: Avoiding leaven is the great emphasis of the passage. The Passover would not work with leaven, and there is a leaven that causes paralysis in the ministry of the local church because it grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit. Paul describes it in 1 Cor. 5:6-8, the passage that tells us that Christ is our Passover: "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Our worship must be unleavened, and our witness must be unleavened, because both our worship and our witness are nothing if not empowered by the Holy Spirit. So our worship and witness must avoid malice and wickedness in favor of sincerity (or purity) and truth. Paul's prescription is

greatly needed in our worship and witness: stop self-glory, purge out malice and wickedness, realize that in Christ you are perfectly unleavened in God's eyes already, and prioritize sincerity (or purity) and truth in your life.

IV. The Passover commission must be obeyed, and so must our Christian commission (v. 28).

Application: Imagine with me if you will, an Old Testament account of the history of the nation of Israel in which every passage ended with a verse like verse 28 of this passage. What might God have done for Israel and with Israel then? Tragically, that is not how our Old Testament reads. The obedience of this verse was the exception, not the rule, and in fact, the generation who obeys here is not even allowed into the promised land because of the disobedience they will commit later.

Conclusion: And so on the whole, the Israelites in their failure to obey are very much like nearly every local church that has ever existed since Jesus gave New Testament believers like us the Great Commission. Still, in spite of the failures of the nation as a whole, we do read about Joshuas and Calebs and Davids and Elishas and Isaiahs and Josiahs and Daniels and Ezras and Ruths and Esthers throughout this history of disobedience and commission failure.

I honestly believe that just as Israel failed in their commission, so most local churches will ultimately fail in ours. How many of the local churches of the letters of Revelation still exist as orthodox gospel worshippers and witnesses today? Not one.

Nevertheless, "the eyes of the Lord [still] look to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in be-

half of him whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chron. 16:9). We have an opportunity to be the exception to the rule of disobedient failure, empowered by God's Spirit, and a gospel blessing in our world.

In the end Jesus Christ is at the center of Christianity, our Passover commission. We seek to pass our faith unchanged generation after generation because we are the body of Christ, and He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We seek to be faithful in assembling to worship and witness, because Jesus Christ is worthy of our adoration and praise, and that of the nations as well. We seek to purge out the old leaven of malice and wickedness because we represent the unblemished Lamb, who was perfectly pure and true. And we determine to obey with the mind of Christ, whose obedience caused Him to die for us, yea even the death of the cross. Christ is the Savior of the Christian's commission. Is He yours?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching