

Maundy Thursday

YOUR LAMB

Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14

Maundy Thursday

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 2This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. 3Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. 4If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. 5Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. 7They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. 10You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. 12For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute

judgments: I am the LORD. 13The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

14This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

DIAGNOSIS: Forgetful, Forgotten

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Disintegrated*

After his people had been identified as slaves for years, God wanted to see them establish a new collective memory of their own. These people hardly knew themselves as anything but slaves; proudly calling themselves “Israel” would have seemed far-fetched, if not an embarrassing admission of their disintegration as a people. They had been separated from each other; their families torn apart; their sense of common purpose lost. So God gave them an occasion-later re-enacted as the Passover celebration-to identify them with God and with each other. The event involved a thoroughly prescribed meal: an unblemished lamb roasted over a fire, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. The menu hardly seems worth mentioning, but that is exactly as God plans it: The meal is meant to be a reflection of the hurried manner in which the people eat an “unforgettable” meal before they escape from Egypt. The bitter herbs are to remind them of the bitterness of slavery; roasted lamb because there was no time for proper preparation; and unleavened bread because the bread must be made hurriedly.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Almost Plagued*

All this nearly-ceremonial ritual would have been impressive enough; but add to that a splash of blood on the lintel of the

slaves' houses, and you have the makings of a horrific thriller: The angel of death would be sweeping over the land of Egypt, and these misfits had been given a "pass"; they would not die, if they followed God's instructions. But who was this God who told them what to do? Would they want to entrust themselves to this God who plagued the Egyptians and hardened Pharaoh's heart? It must have seemed like quite a predicament to those slaves: Stay in Egypt and suffer the wrath of the Pharaoh, or leave Egypt with a God who had seemingly ignored them for 400-some years.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Struck Down in Egypt (v. 12)*

Surely, we may think, no slave would choose to stay in slavery. But consider the options: The people were damned if they stayed (Pharaoh was no gracious god, despite his claims; and God's anger had only made Pharaoh more stubborn). And they were damned if they left (rushing into the arms of a God who makes boils rise on people's skin, rivers bleed, and who renders death on whomever he chooses). If they didn't obey this God, they would be struck down in Egypt with the Egyptians; if they left Egypt they would be depending on an unpredictable and life-threatening God in an unknown land. Either way, they were damned.

PROGNOSIS: Remembered, Remembering

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Blood Shall Be a Sign (v. 13)*

But what if the blood that needed to be spilled was the blood of God's own unblemished lamb-instead of the lamb acquired by the slaves? What if the God who prescribed the way to accomplish freedom on that first Passover night, actually fulfilled his own commandment for those first slaves and for us through Jesus-his body given for us, his blood shed for us-after that night in which he was betrayed? What if the God who commands us to place our total and absolute trust in him (to be led out of slavery),

poignantly surrenders himself-enslaves himself-to our bitter human condition to free us? Finally, that is the end of the Passover for us: Christ's blood on the lintel of our hearts, while we hurriedly and anxiously feast on him who will sustain us as we wander away from slavery, and into God's promised land.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Your Unblemished Lamb (v. 5)*

The lamb those slaves ate was not meant to last more than that first Passover night. When they finished eating, they were to dispose of its excess; their food was here and gone. Not so with "your Lamb": Jesus, Lamb of God, whom we trust takes away the sin (not only of Israel, but all), is food for more than an event or a moment in time. This unblemished Lamb, pledges to feed the world on his mercy for a lifetime and more, and we cling to that promise. And whenever we eat the bread that is his body, and drink the wine that is his blood, death's angel passes over us. Christ, our unblemished Lamb, truly frees us from death. So we remember Christ's meal; we enact his promises over and over again. And we trust that each time we encounter Christ in the bread and wine, we receive his promises unspoiled.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Don't Forget through the Generations (v. 14)*

Without God's Passover Lamb, Jesus, we would remain slaves (if not to Egypt, then certainly to sin). But because Jesus offers himself to us and the world, we center our collective memory on the meal in which he makes himself our unblemished Lamb. And we issue invitations to, and set place cards for those who haven't yet met Christ. This Passover meal is not only for us, but for the generations. Together we remember Christ, whose blood causes the angel of death to pass over us, and we become God's people. We, who have been aliens and slaves to one another, become brothers and sisters, and the bitter taste of slavery is washed away by the sweet taste of freedom in Christ.