

Reading the Signs

Luke 22:7-23

SIGNS

If you've ever travelled by air? When you arrive at your destination, you go through passports and customs and you come out into the arrivals hall and there in front of you are lots of people with name cards meeting people from the flights. Why? Because most of the people awaiting arrivals don't know who they are looking for and the name cards are signs which show the arrival who their taxi driver or whatever is.

WOMEN WITH POTS

The disciples didn't have a clue who they were supposed to be meeting. They just had instructions to go to the city and find who it was that Jesus had arranged the Passover room with. So they needed a sign – a man with a pot on his head. That was an easy sign for the disciples as men usually didn't do that kind of carrying – the women did it unless they were ill or something so the men had to - so it was unusual but not so unusual that it should arouse too much interest.

PASSOVER PICTURE

Jesus had obviously planned the Passover with someone he knew but the disciples didn't. Why all the cloak and dagger? For two reasons I think. Firstly the Chief Priests etc were trying to capture Jesus in order to kill Him. Jesus knew that but was not going to give Himself into their hands before His time. There was to be that time when Jesus would WASH THE DISCIPLES FEET – SHARE PASSOVER – and teach them some profound things which we read in John's gospel.

Jesus was obviously effective in keeping his location secret because it took betrayal from Judas to deliver Jesus into their hands, and as we read, Jesus knew that he would be betrayed and by Judas. Of course, it wasn't the purpose of Jesus to stop Judas from betraying Him, it was case of Jesus making sure that he was captured, at His time and at a place of His choosing.

The second reason was that people still wanted to see Jesus and crowded Him. He needed privacy to spend time in prayer and with His disciples so He would have made sure that the Passover meal would be celebrated where people may find out and a crowd gather.

GETHSEMANE

It's a great story of preparation. Jesus prepared on a human level for the Passover, but on a spiritual level it was a time when He would reveal profound things to His disciples, where He would speak with the Father in Gethsemane before being captured and crucified. It was all prepared, planned, even from eternity what was going to happen.

PEOPLE PIC

It reminds us of the need to prepare as Christians. We need to be ready for what God wants to do in our lives. Do we know that? Are we sure? Have we been listening lately?

If we are not sure then we should seek out His will and be sensitive to His leading.

How prepared are we for this meal this morning? Are we ready to be with Jesus this morning? Or have we brought all our worries with us? Or brought in sin that's not been confessed and dealt with? By His Spirit, Jesus is with us. This is an important time. This table is His table. Are we ready to hear His voice? Are we ready to respond?

JESUS AND DISCIPLES AGAIN

So we come to Luke's account of the Lord's Supper. We know what Jesus instituted came at the end of the Passover Meal. Luke's account of the last supper differs slightly from Matthew's and Mark's because it has a cup before the bread. Why? Luke is probably indicating here that they had come to a particular stage in the Jewish Passover (Seder) meal. It was probably the last breaking of bread in the meal which came after one of the ceremonial toasts after which UNLEAVENED BREAD there was the breaking of a piece of bread called the afikomen which was bread saved from earlier in the meal and used as dessert.

Luke's mention of the Passover toast here is important because as Jesus gives the toast he says "I have wanted so much to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer! For I tell you, I will never eat it until it is given its full meaning in the Kingdom of God." It was indicating that Jesus was closing a stage in his life. What happens next is then that Jesus introduces something new – a new picture, sign or whatever, related to the old Passover one, but having a particular meaning to the disciples once they had witnessed what was to come in the following hours.

For this Jesus uses the afikomen – the saved piece of bread. For the Jews in Jesus' time who were not able to sacrifice in the temple because they lived away, and particularly after the temple was destroyed in AD70 the afikomen was regarded as the most important part of the meal because for them it took the place of the lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. Because the temple was still there when Jesus was in Jerusalem that evening the lambs were still ritually slaughtered. And of course it was at Passover lamb that what was known as the paschal lamb was ritually slaughtered and his blood taken into the Holy of Holies in the Temple to atone for the sins of the nation.

The word afikomen actually comes from a Greek word and means "He who is come". The rabbis don't actually know how this came about. What was it pointing to. But as people who follow Jesus, we know the answer: when Jesus broke the afikomen and said "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in memory of me." he was identifying Himself with the Lamb of God. He was going to be slaughtered once for all in just a few hours. So the bread He broke stands as a symbol to us too of the Lamb of God who was killed, who was broken.

Jesus makes this picture of His death complete with the cup following "This cup is God's

new covenant sealed with my blood, which is poured out for you. In the old covenant, a lamb was killed every year to atone for the nations sin, but it could never take it away. That was the old covenant. In His death Jesus was indicating that God was making a new covenant – and that covenant was sealed by the shedding of Jesus' blood. In a few moments I'm going to read some verses from Hebrews that confirm that this was a once for all and final shedding of blood and it's more than adequate to deal with all our sins, past, present and future. If we know Jesus as Saviour and Lord, we use this eating of bread and drinking of wine as a sign to remind us that our sins have been dealt with one for all. Each time we do it, it points us again to Jesus.

BREAD AND WINE

So this bread stands as a symbol of the lamb who was sacrificed once and for all – the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Similarly we remember His shed blood in the drinking of the cup.

Communion isn't just a sign where Jesus has been for us but has a future aspect too, because as we look back to the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, we realise that we have a hope for the future. It is a hope of eternal life because our sins have been dealt with by Jesus and we have been brought into relationship with the Father. So it's a sign that points us to the future.

But actually it's a sign about the present too. If we have this hope this morning, then the invitation is to come, break the bread, drink from the cup. This is Jesus' table. He's alive. His Spirit is with us. So we encounter Jesus at His table – but be prepared for Him to speak to us. Perhaps He's already been challenging you about some area of your life that needs to be brought under His control, some relationship problem that you need to deal with, some area of service He's calling you to.

As Jesus challenged His disciples that Passover evening, allow Him to challenge you today. For the disciples, the following days and weeks were a life-changing experience. Coming to the table should be too.

Prayer

Communion

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