

Celebrating the Passover -- Mark 14:12-21

by Travis Dean
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Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

Lord, we need You just now. I need Your Spirit to be an effective messenger. And each person listening needs Your Spirit to not only be hearers of Your word, but doers. We pray for this in Jesus' name, amen.

The setting for our story today is the Passover. It was arguably the most anticipated and celebrated holiday of the Jewish year. Today we are similarly anticipating the most celebrated holiday in our culture – Christmas. Both of these holidays embrace faith, family and food. I thought you might find it interesting to see a comparison of the menus for the Passover and Christmas celebration.

Two special menus in comparison:

<u>Passover</u>	<u>Christmas</u>
1. Entrée (lamb)	1. Entrée (dinner roast)
2. Unleavened Bread	2. Dinner Rolls
3. Bitter Herbs (horseradish)	3. ?
4. Vegetables (lettuce, etc.)	4. Vegetables (salad, potatoes, green beans)
5. Relish Sauce (almonds, dates, figs, raisins, spice, and vinegar)	5. Cranberry Relish/Fruitcake
6. Unfermented Wine	6. Drinks (apple cider, eggnog, wassail)

First is the entrée. At Passover the entrée consisted of the Passover lamb. At Christmas we also have an entrée which varies depending on if you're a vegetarian or not. Honey glazed ham is quite popular in our culture but not nearly as healthy as lamb meat would be. There are some really good vegetarian dinner roasts, if you haven't tried them. You could see me afterwards if you would like to know where to buy them or how to make them. Second on the menu for Passover is the unleavened bread. Bread is often a part of the Christmas menu as well. Dinner rolls are quite popular. Third on the menu for the Passover was bitter herbs, which consisted of horseradish, romaine lettuce, parsley or something similar. We don't have an exact equivalent for the Christmas menu, but if you're brave you could try something of the sort this year. Fourth on the menu for the Passover was some sort of vegetable, such as lettuce. Of course vegetables are also a common part of a Christmas menu, such as salad, potatoes, and green beans. Fifth on the menu for the Passover was a relish sauce. It was a blend of almonds, dates, figs, raisins, spice, and vinegar. It might remind you of a cranberry relish or fruitcake, which many people like for Christmas. Sixth on the menu was an unfermented wine. Drinks are also an important part of the Christmas menu. Apple cider, eggnog, or wassail are some favorites.

I hope you're eagerly anticipating your Christmas celebration of faith, family and food. And in that anticipation you will feel the anticipation of the Jews in our story on the eve of Passover.

Here's a summary of our story:

The disciples came to Jesus asking where to prepare the Passover. Jesus responded by sending two of them into Jerusalem with specific instructions as to where to go and what to say. The disciples found everything just as Jesus had said and began to prepare for the Passover. Later, as Jesus was eating the Passover meal with His disciples, He declared that one of them would betray Him. The disciples were alarmed, wondering how this could be.

Let's now consider what Jesus experienced in this story. First, Jesus experienced preserving His Passover celebration. Mark 14:12 gives the setting of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. You may remember from Mark 14:1 that the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover are used interchangeably to refer to the same festival. The events in verses 12-17, then, would have taken place on the 13th day of the Jewish month, Nisan,

the first month on the Jewish calendar. The Passover being on the 14th day of Nisan, would fall on Friday that year. So it would have been Thursday morning, the eve of Passover, when the disciples came to Jesus with their question. What was their question? Mark 14:12 tells us. (Read) They wanted to know where they were going to celebrate the Passover. It was only a few hours away and they still needed to prepare for it. Why had Jesus delayed in making these arrangements? Verses 10 and 11 of Mark 12 give us a clue. Judas had met with the high priests and agreed to hand Jesus over to them. So Judas was now looking for an opportune time and most likely keeping the high priests alerted as to Jesus' whereabouts. So it seems that Jesus was preventing Judas, and in fact all the disciples, from knowing where He would be celebrating the Passover. This would have certainly been frustrating and perplexing for Judas to have no inside information to share with the high priests.

Notice Jesus' response in Mark 14:13-15 to the disciples' question. (Read) Jesus still did not name the location. His instructions sound quite similar to the instructions He gave in Mark 11 to two of His disciples leading up to the Triumphal Entry. He told them in advance what would happen and what they would find, clearly revealing His foresight and sovereignty. He was clearly in control of the situation on that eve of Passover.

In Luke's account of this story (Luke 22:7) he reveals that the two disciples Jesus sent into Jerusalem were Peter and John Mark 14:13 says that Jesus sent them into the city, which would have been Jerusalem. So, evidently, Jesus and His disciples were staying outside of Jerusalem, unlike most people at that time, who would have been preparing for the Passover celebration in Jerusalem. Again, this likely was intentional on Jesus' part in order to avoid unnecessary and premature conflict with the high priests. In Mark 14:13 Jesus told Peter and John that after they had entered Jerusalem, a man would meet them carrying a pitcher of water. What amazing timing God has, amen? He knew how long it would take for that man to fill his water pitcher. He knew how fast that man would walk. He knew how fast Peter and John would walk. What a demonstration of His intimate acquaintance with all our ways!

When Peter and John spoke to the person in charge of the house where the man went in with the water, they were to speak on Jesus' behalf. Jesus told them to ask for the "guest room". And here we have an interesting connection between this story and the Christmas story. This word translated, "guest room" is the same word that is translated "inn" in Luke 2:7. When Jesus was in Mary's womb, Joseph asked to stay in the inn. But there was no room. Here in Mark 14 Jesus asked for the "guest room" (or "inn"). But interestingly, in the Greek Jesus could actually have asked for "My guestroom". Jesus had already chosen where He wanted to stay and assumed ownership of this "inn". Jesus further told Peter and John that they would find everything "furnished and prepared". " In other words, the place would have already been cleaned. The carpets would have already been laid out. Jesus had not been procrastinating. He had made sure that everything would be taken care of in advance.

When Peter and John left, they found that everything happened just the way Jesus said it would. It all worked out perfectly and smoothly. There were no hiccups. Mark 14:17 reveals that Jesus arrived at the specified location "in the evening... with the Twelve". In other words, Peter and John must have returned to tell Jesus when they had finished preparing for the Passover meal. And in the evening they all arrived in the guest room together. The phrase, "in the evening" could perhaps be better translated, "after it had become late". The sun had already gone down. It was getting dark. Again, this was likely intentional on Jesus' part to avoid being discovered by the high priests. You may recall that in Scripture a new day begins at sunset. So, when Jesus and His disciples arrived at the guest room, it was now the 14th day of the Jewish month, Nisan. The festival of Passover had officially begun.

Second, Jesus experienced disclosing immediate treachery. I use "immediate" in the sense of immediate family as well as something that was imminent. Mark 14:18 says that Jesus and His disciples "sat and ate". "Reclining and eating" would be a more literal translation. This short statement reveals the highlight of Passover. I imagine this occasion would be like Friday night has been to me growing up as a Seventh-day Adventist. This has usually been my favorite part of the Sabbath. Similarly, the evening of Christmas Eve has often been my favorite part of Christmas. It's a relaxing and inspirational time. So I can imagine Jesus and His disciples enjoying the moment for which they had all been eagerly waiting and anticipating. In the midst of this time of

savory food and special fellowship Jesus made a startling prediction. In Mark 14:18 He says, "Assuredly I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me." On earlier occasions Jesus had predicted that He would be betrayed. (Mark 9:31; 10:33) But this was the first time that he had predicted that one of His closest disciples would perform this treachery.

Notice the disciples' reaction in Mark 14:19. (Read) Their expressions and feelings immediately began to change. They could hardly believe that one of them would be the source of such treachery. Mark says one by one they began to ask, "Is it I?" The words, "Is it" are actually not included in the Greek manuscripts. "Not me!" would perhaps be a better translation. They were torn between believing that Jesus' words were true and not comprehending how this could be possible. The statement in Mark 14:19, "And another said, 'Is it I?'" is not in the Greek manuscripts, but you will find this thought mentioned in Matthew's account of this story. And Matthew reveals that this last disciple to ask was Judas. (Matthew 26:25)

Perhaps the disciples went around the room, each in turn asking Jesus for some reassurance that it wasn't them. Or perhaps it was more random than that. We don't know for sure. Mark does not state whether or not Jesus answered each of the disciples' inquiries. But he does record an answer from Jesus in Mark 14:20. (Read) Jesus in essence repeated Himself with even more clear definition. The betrayer was indeed one of those in that circle in the upper room who was even then dipping their bread in the relish sauce. Most of us probably don't like to dip tortilla chips in salsa or guacamole that someone else has double dipped in. There are very few people that I will eat out of the same dish with. But Jesus' words in Mark 14:20 reveal an intimate experience in the Jewish culture. Perhaps it would be like a mom feeding her little child off of her own plate.

Notice Jesus' words in verse 21. (Read) It's a cry, mourning the loss of separation. "Woe!" Jesus said. "Alas!" He mourned for His betrayer who didn't know to mourn for himself. Interestingly, Jesus switched in these words from first and second person to third person. Instead of saying, "Me", He referred to Himself as "the Son of Man. Instead of referring to His betrayer as "one of you", He referred to him as "that man". Perhaps it was simply poetic. Or maybe Jesus was depicting the distance that had grown between Himself and His betrayer.

Jesus declared in Mark 14:21 that it was God's plan for Jesus to "go away" (die). However, Judas' betrayal was not necessary. It was, in fact, a tragedy. What could possibly be "good" for His betrayer? Jesus says, "To have never been born." What a sad lament on such a special evening of celebration!

Now that we've looked at what Jesus experienced in this story, let's now consider how He is revealed as our example in this story. Being a Christian is all about be like Christ. The life that Jesus lived is the life that we've been given. How He responded in His circumstances reveals to us how we should respond when we face similar circumstances. We will consider two ways in which Jesus is revealed as our example in this story.

First of all, He is revealed as our example in that He guarded time alone with His disciples. This was Jesus' last Passover with His twelve disciples. Later that same night His disciples would all leave Him alone (Mark 14:50). Jesus intentionally kept their whereabouts a secret, so that Judas could not relay any inside information to the high priests. He didn't take all of the twelve disciples to the place of their Passover celebration until it was already time for the Passover to begin and darkness was settling in. He would not let anything or anyone rob Him of this special time with His disciples. It was not easy or convenient. But it didn't matter who was working against Him. He made it happen.

This determination reminds me of what Dave Ramsey calls gazelle intensity. It's something that happens to someone who's fed up with living from paycheck to paycheck or being a slave to the lender. They scream, "I've had it! I'm not going to live like this anymore! I'm not going to wake up another day letting life just happen to me. I'm taking control of my life!" There's a growl in their throat and a fire has been lit under them. They start selling so much stuff to get out of debt, that the kids think they're next. Dave Ramsey says that those people are the ones who get out of debt and change their family tree.

This is the determination Jesus had to spend that Passover alone with His disciples. And this is the gazelle intensity we need for defending our time alone with God. How easy it is, especially with the business of the Christmas season, to become distant from God. But Jesus reveals that a healthy Christian who will not tolerate being distant from God. They will not be a slave to a hectic schedule any longer. Feeling empty, alone and depressed is no longer an option. They scream with gazelle intensity, "I'm not going to live like this anymore! I'm done with the excuses! I might fail at everything else, but I'm not going to fail at this! Quality time with God is a must-have in my life. I might not know how, but by God's grace I'm going to find a way to make it happen." And believe me, God will be there to meet you. He will fight with you and for you on this. There's nothing He wants more than quality time and a real, meaningful, and personal relationship with you.

Jesus is also revealed as our example in that He nurtured the faith of His disciples. Turn with me to John 13:18, 19. (Read) Jesus is here speaking of His betrayer, whose actions and identity are specifically revealed in Psalm 41:9. Jesus also reveals the reason why He chose to reveal to His disciples the immediate treachery that night in the upper room. Jesus says in John 13:19 that it was so they might believe that He was the great I AM, the divine Son of God. Just as Jesus was intent on removing causes for unbelief in His disciples, even so God is working to establish faith in you. According to Romans 10:10 belief arises in the heart. So a healthy Christian is someone whose heart is being filled with faith and being set free from doubt. For several years of my life my heart was plagued with doubts. I knew a lot about being a Seventh-day Adventist and even about the Bible, but my heart was dissatisfied. Often while I was contemplating the life of Christ or some honorable Bible character, a voice in my mind would say, "That's not you. You'll never get there." A wall stood between where I was and where I felt God wanted me to be. But through a miracle of God, when in my mind I saw Jesus on the cross and I heard a voice saying that His death was more than enough for me, faith arose in my heart. I believed that His death had set me free from doubt and had made ME all that God wanted me to be. Doubt, desperation, and depression lost their power over me that day.

God is working to build a faith in your heart just as He did for His disciples and for me.

I would like to close with this quote from the book, Testimonies for the Church Volume 2, page 212

When men and women can more fully comprehend the magnitude of the great sacrifice which was made by the Majesty of heaven in dying in man's stead, then will the plan of salvation be magnified, and reflections of Calvary will awaken tender, sacred, and lively emotions in the Christian's heart. Praises to God and the Lamb will be in their hearts and upon their lips. Pride and self-esteem cannot flourish in the hearts that keep fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary.

The Christmas season is a time to contemplate the scenes of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem. But every day of our lives should be spent contemplating the scenes of Calvary. In the words of our closing hymn, "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly", Christ the babe was born for you. Indeed, He was born to die. And in His death, we find freedom.