

## ***“24 Hours that Changed the World—The Last Supper”***

Today we're starting a series to get us ready for Easter. Listen, Easter is huge. And not because of Easter bunnies and candy and all that junk. Easter is huge because it's the central day, the pivotal point, of the Christian faith. Easter is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. After everybody thought he was dead and gone, oops, not so much! Without the resurrection of Jesus on Easter there would be no Christianity. Jesus would have been crucified, dead, buried and soon forgotten. Whether you are a follower of Jesus or not, the fact is that Easter changed the world.

So because Easter is so important that we take a few weeks prior to it to get ready. And this year we're going to get ready for Easter by looking at what happened in the last 24 hours of Jesus' life. He knew how much time he had to live so he very carefully used that time. He did things and said things that would culminate his life on earth.

I think of it this way: if I knew for sure I had 24 hours left to live, there are certain things I would want to do, to say, to establish. There are certain people I'd want to be with, certain instructions I'd want to leave. You'd do the same thing if you knew you had 24 hours left to live. You'd make sure that that 24 hours was spent doing the most important stuff.

And that's what Jesus did. We have an amazing record of those last 24 hours and what he did and said can have a huge impact on our lives today. And listen, this series of messages isn't just a history lesson, it's about life lessons, Jesus wanted to leave a legacy in that 24 hours that would have an effect on your life and mine. This is real stuff.

I want us to take the time to look at three questions as we focus on the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples. The first question is this: **What was really happening at this meal?** Let's set the stage first. Jesus has gone to the city of Jerusalem with his 12 disciples to celebrate the Jewish feast of the Passover. For 1,600 years before Jesus it was every Jew's obligation to celebrate the Passover meal. Jesus had done this every year of his life.

He entered Jerusalem on a Sunday, what Christians call Palm Sunday, and crowds of people welcomed him as a king. They were hoping, because of what they'd heard about Jesus' power, that he would be the one to crush the Romans.

That was Sunday. The next morning, Monday, he went back into the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. As he walked into the Temple he was angered by all people there selling things and exchanging Roman money for Jewish money. It had become like a flea market. Jesus said, "This is supposed to be a place of prayer and worship but you've made it a den of thieves." He turned over the money changers tables and drove out the people who were buying and selling stuff. That infuriated the religious leaders—the men who controlled the Temple.

Then Jesus then spent time teaching in the Temple courts. He taught there Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Crowds gathered around him to listen and every day Jesus would push harder and challenge the religious leaders. He would say things like, "Woe to you religious leaders, you're hypocrites, you're like whitewashed tombs. All beautiful on the outside but inside filled with death and decay."

Jesus challenged the people saying things like, "Do what your religious leaders teach you, but don't do as they do." How do you think the religious leaders took statements like that? It infuriated them. And finally enough was enough and the three powerful religious groups, the Pharisees, the Scribes, the Sadducees, got together and decided that this man Jesus had to die. By Thursday they had a plan, a plot, to put him to death.

The tension between Jesus and the religious leaders grew to a point that by Thursday, Jesus felt he couldn't show his face publicly in the Temple. And Thursday was the day that the Passover meal had to be eaten. So at noon on Thursday, he sent two of his disciples on a mission. He told them, "Go into the city and get the Passover meal ready for us. You'll see a man carrying a jug of water, follow him and he'll take you to an upper room that's ready for us." Carrying water was a woman's job in that day, so a man carrying a jug of water would be a clear sign. It happened just like Jesus told them.

Let's talk about that traditional Passover meal. One of the preparations for that meal would have been the slaughtering of a lamb. Peter and John took a lamb to the Temple, just like thousands of other Jews did, where a priest would have slaughtered it as a sacrifice. The priests would have dressed the lamb and given it back to Peter and John. Peter and John would have taken back to that upstairs room and roasted for 3 or 4 hours. At around 7 p.m. Jesus and the other 10 disciples would have arrived at the house for the Passover meal.

Remember, everything Jesus does in this 24 hour period is significant, important. Jesus chose his last supper to be a Passover meal. Why? Because the Passover meal pointed to him. First we have to remember where the Jewish Passover comes from. Go all the way back to Exodus chapter 12 and you'll find the story of when the Jews were slaves in Egypt for 400 years building buildings for Pharaoh and making bricks for those buildings. They cried out to God in the oppression of that slavery and God heard their cry. God sent Moses to set them free.

Moses goes to Pharaoh and says, "Let God's people go." Pharaoh refuses and so God sends one plague after another to convince Pharaoh to set the people free. Pharaoh still won't let them go. God says to Moses, "I'll send one final plague and after this Pharaoh will have to set you free. I will send the angel of death by night and it will go through the entire land of Egypt and the first born of every home will die on that night. The firstborn of every animal will die on that night." Then God said to Moses, "Tell my people to take a lamb and slaughter it, and put the blood of the lamb around the doorframes of their homes. When the angel of death comes to those homes where the blood of the lamb is on the doorframe, he will passover those homes without taking a life." That's where the word Passover comes from.

That night the lambs were cooked and eaten along with other things. It was the Jews last meal before being set free from slavery. The next day the angel of death had visited many homes including the home of Pharaoh himself and then he demanded that the Jews leave Egypt forever. The people had to leave so quickly that there was no time to allow their bread dough to rise, they had to make the bread without yeast, without leavening, and that's the bread they took with them to eat. Passover is also known as the feast of unleavened bread.

As the Jews left Egypt, that is when they became a nation again. They were no longer slaves, they had been set free, and they were now a people. God commanded them that from that point on they would celebrate Passover every year at that time. And to remember, a lamb was to be sacrificed and roasted and eaten along with unleavened bread. God commanded them to do this every year and in the Passover meal to teach their children and their children's children that they were once slaves but now they're free.

This is the meal that Jesus and the disciples would have been taking part in at that Last Supper. A meal of symbolism, a time to remember. Jesus chose this meal as a big part of his last 24.

The Passover is meant to be a joyful celebration of God goodness and deliverance from slavery. But that last supper with Jesus was not joyful. Jesus had talked about his crucifixion and that was in the back of everybody's mind and there were so many questions.

And then in the middle of the Passover meal Jesus says to the disciples, "One of you will betray me." The disciples started saying, "Is it me? Surely it's not me!" Jesus' words still echo, "One of you will betray me." He could have said, "All of you will betray me." Judas was the one who would sell Jesus out and lead the Temple guards to him. Judas betrayed him, but Peter would deny even knowing Jesus three times that night, and all the others would abandon him. Jesus' closest friends would betray him, deny him and desert him that night.

And that leads to the second question today. **When have you been Judas?** When have you been Peter? Or the other disciples? When have you betrayed Jesus, or denied him, or deserted him? The reality is that all of us will sometime. All of us. There have been times when I betrayed Jesus by my actions, or by my words, or by my thoughts or by the things I didn't do. I have betrayed him, I have denied him and I have deserted him.

There were times when I should have stood up and spoken up but I kept my mouth shut because I was too afraid to stand and be counted at one of his followers. All of us will do this from time to time.

Just recently a woman came up to me after worship and said, "Aaron can I talk to you." I said sure and we stepped off to the side of the lobby. She said something like, "It's been so long since I've been in church because I did something that I knew just disappointed God. I just couldn't bring myself to come." I say, "Don't you understand that that's all of us?" All of us will disappoint him. All of us will betray him. And Lent is a great time for anybody who's betrayed, denied or deserted to come back to Jesus.

Think about that Last Supper. Jesus knew what all those disciples would do but he still washed their feet, even Judas' feet, and he still gave them the bread and the wine that was his body and blood. Knowing what they were about to do to him, Jesus still looked them in the eye and said, "I no longer call you servants, I call you my friends." Jesus knew they would betray, deny and desert him and he still loved them.

Jesus knows the things you are going to do, and he still loves you. He just wants you to come back. That's part of this season of Lent—returning to the one we've betrayed.

After announcing that one of them would betray him, Jesus does something strange, something unusual. He took the unleavened bread and gave thanks to God and broke it and gave the traditional blessing over it. That wasn't so strange, but when he broke it he gave it to his disciples and said, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you." That was strange. That's not part of the Passover meal.

Then Jesus takes a cup of wine and gives the traditional blessing. But then he does something strange. He says, "This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." He's not supposed to say that! What's Jesus talking about?! But Jesus is morphing the Passover meal, he's transforming it and giving us something new, something like the Passover Seder, but different. He's giving us Holy Communion, the Eucharist.

Jesus was tying back into the ancient words of the prophet Jeremiah. The people of Israel, the Jews, had been unfaithful to God, but God is restoring them. **"The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD... 'I will be their God, and they will be my people....They will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more' (Jeremiah 31:31-34, TNIV).**

Jesus seems to have that in mind when he takes that cup and says, "This is my blood of the covenant." He's establishing that new covenant with all of humanity where God is offering to save us from our own slavery to sin and death. God's offering to give us new life and a new beginning. God is offering to take those who are not a people and make them, the whole human race, into his people. Jesus is doing something profound here! He's transforming the nature of what it means to be human inviting all people to be followers of God.

In a traditional Passover meal the idea is that you start out as a slave, the story is told, and by the end of the meal you are free—you start the meal as a slave, by the end you realize that you are a people, the people of God.

That's also the story of the Lord's Supper. When we eat the bread and drink from the cup we remember how we were saved, that our salvation came at the cost of a man's life—God in human flesh. He suffered and died for us. That's a big story! And if you're going to be a follower you've got to get it! Every time you take the bread and the wine you remember, it shapes your life, it becomes your defining story. It defines who are and who you will be in the future. It is the birth of us as a people.

We come into that meal remembering that we were slaves to sin and death, living for ourselves and on our own, and then we leave that meal free, knowing our Savior, choosing to follow him. Accepting his grace and mercy in our lives. That's how this meal is meant to affect us as followers of Jesus Christ. It's meant to be a celebration. It defines who we are, and whose we are, and where we are going.

Let's make it personal. This is the last question: **What memories define you?** What things do you play and replay over and over in your mind that make you who you are today? Maybe it was abuse as a kid, or an alcoholic parent, or the time somebody hurt you. Those memories define you. But listen, whatever those memories might be, there is one memory that's meant to define you more than any other. It's the memory that comes with certain words. You hear them every time we have the Lord's Supper. On the night that Jesus was betrayed he took bread and gave thanks and blessed that bread, broke and gave it to his disciples saying, "This is my body broken for you, do this as often as you eat it and remember me." And after the supper was over Jesus took the cup, blessed it and passed it to his disciples saying, "This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of your sins, do this as often as you drink it and remember me."

These are the words, this is the meal, this is the memory that is meant to define you. This simple meal for centuries has broken down and built up. It's broken down barriers between people, barriers of race, class, economic levels, education levels. This, for centuries, has been the meal where men and women gathered together to be one, to be God's people, forgiven, loved and free.

For centuries as men and women have taken part in the Lord's Supper they have walked away free from sin, free from shame, free from guilt, free from patterns that enslaved them. That's the power of this simple meal. I pray that if you've been listening today, that you will become a person defined by the Last Supper.

Jesus carefully chose his words and actions in his last 24. He chose this meal for a reason—remember me. I hope that each time you take communion, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist it's not just a ritual, but a time for you to place yourself in this story.

Why is all this important? It's always important, but particularly important when times are hard. When your health fails, when there's a death of a loved one, when someone or something you were counting on fails. This last week I talked with one retired couple who live off the income from their investments which means they're living off of half of what they did 18 months ago. I talked to one woman, a single mom, who was told that her job is ending at the end of the month. In tough times it's all the more important to remember what the Lord's Supper means. Jesus loves you enough to die for you, and he will lead you through the hard stuff. The Jesus that said "Remember" is the same Jesus who said, "In the world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world." He's the same Jesus who said, "Don't worry about tomorrow, look how I take care of the birds, imagine how I will care for you." The Jesus we remember in the Lord's Supper is the same Jesus who told us, "I will lay down my life for you and those who are in my hands I will not let go." At this meal we remember that this Jesus who said, "Remember my broken body for you, my blood poured out for you" he's the same Jesus who said, "I will be with you always." Don't let circumstances of life define you. Choose to let this meal define you.

And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

*I thank Rev. Adam Hamilton for his resources in this message. I am also indebted to William Barclay's commentary [The Lord's Supper](#) for invaluable insights.*