

Jesus is called the Passover lamb. We hear a little glimpse of this in our Gospel reading where it says that everything that happened today on Maundy Thursday happens the day before the Passover, so that means that Good Friday was actually the Passover, the day on which Jesus was crucified and died. And we will hear on Sunday, Paul will tell us in 1 Corinthians that "Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the feast in sincerity and truth." So the Bible very clearly tells us that Jesus is our Passover lamb. Now, what does that mean exactly? What do we mean when we say that Jesus is the Passover lamb? To understand that we have to go back to our Old Testament reading from Exodus chapter 12, because when we understand what the Passover lamb is there, that will help us to understand what the New Testament is talking about when it says that Jesus is now our Passover lamb.

So in this point of the book of Exodus, the people of Israel have been watching God send plague after plague upon the Egyptians. And they probably thought as they were standing there, as is only natural to do, "the Egyptians deserved all of this and maybe I am actually better because I'm not having to suffer any of these things." Yes, they had to endure some of the plagues of the very beginning. But then God made a distinction between Egypt and between Israel, and most of his plagues, and most of the severe ones too, were poured out upon Egypt only. It'd be very easy to think in that situation that, "Yeah, they're really getting what they deserve, right?" Egypt had treated Israel so badly. They had oppressed them. They had enslaved them. They had beat them. Obviously they deserve what they're getting. But we on the other hand are getting what we deserve, that is to say, nothing.

But God tells Moses just before our reading that he's going to send one more plague and the worst of all of them: The death of the firstborn. From the very highest parts of society up around Pharaoh and his family, all the way down to the very lowest, even some of the livestock, all of them would suffer this judgment. The firstborn would die in accordance with God's judgment, and there would not be a house in Egypt where someone was not dead. A very severe judgment indeed. But what's surprising to Israel and perhaps surprising to us is that Israel also suffers this judgment. Israel also has to endure the death of the firstborn if they don't do what God tells them to do. They have deserved this punishment just as much as Egypt. Now, we might say, "But why? Why would that be the case? It seems like Israel hasn't done anything wrong. It seems like Egypt are the one who's done everything wrong. Certainly they deserve this. But why do we?" But Christians, Israel did deserve this judgment, because Israel also had fallen into sin, just not in the same way that Egypt did. Egypt deserved this judgment because of the way that they treated Israel. They deserved this judgment because of their hardness of heart. They deserved this judgment because of what Pharaoh was doing. They certainly deserved everything that came to them. But Israel also deserved this, but for a different reason: because they had fallen into idolatry. They had fallen into worshiping other gods during their time in Egypt. And we see this happening throughout the Old Testament. Just look at the golden calf, for example, where Israel tries to worship God the way that the Egyptians did. Or even when Moses and Joshua will later tell them, "Put away your false gods and follow the Lord only." This was a sin that Israel struggled with for a very, very long time, one that made them guilty in the eyes of God. So they deserved this judgment just as much as Egypt did. They deserved the wrath of God.

Christians, we are in the exact same place as Israel. We might think in our hearts that we don't deserve some of the things which fall upon us, because we're Christians, because we believe in

Jesus, because we belong to the church, whatever the case may be. We might think that we don't deserve the wrath of God. But according to our sinful nature, Christians, we do stand condemned. According to our sins, we do deserve the judgment of God. Because people are not born basically good. They are not born even morally neutral. We are born as sinners. As David says in the Psalm, "In sin did my mother conceive me." Everything that we have done has separated us from God. Because think of it this way, Christians. Just one sin would be enough to deserve God's wrath. Just one. If we had done nothing else wrong, but had sinned that one time, we would be liable to the judgment. But who among us here today can say that we have sinned only once today? Who among us here today can say we have sinned only once in the past hour? Or even only once in the past few minutes? Christians, according to our nature, we are sinners separated from God. As David also says, "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" Or as Paul tells us in Romans, "There is no one who is righteous, no, not one. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That is our judgment, a judgment we so richly deserved.

But more than this, Christians, God's justice demands that something be done about that. God cannot just let it go. He can't just overlook it and forget about it. That would not be just. We understand this too, I think, because if we heard of a case where a criminal who had done some great crime got set free without a trial, without having to go to jail, without having to pay a fine, without even having to do community service, absolutely nothing happened, we would say that that's not right, that something has to be done, that justice demands that what is wrong be made right, that the debt be paid. And that's exactly true of God's justice as well. God can't just overlook it and forget about it. He has to do something about it. He has to make it right. And if we are getting what we deserve, then that will be the judgment of death. Because as Paul tells us again in Romans, "The wages of sin is death."

But God in his mercy has given to us a substitute, one who takes the judgment in our place. God satisfies his justice by pouring out his judgment upon that substitute. And because that substitute has taken all of it upon itself, we are no longer guilty of the things for which we did. That's exactly what's happening with our Passover lamb in Exodus chapter 12. God is providing a substitute so that the firstborn child doesn't have to die. Because on the tenth day of the month, they would bring into their house a lamb, or a goat for that matter. And for four days, that animal would live with them. For four days, it would become just like family. In a very real sense, it would become part of the family, as if it was one of the children. And then on the fourteenth day, four days later, they would sacrifice this lamb, and they would take the blood and they would put it on the doorpost and over the top of the door, all as a way of saying that a death has occurred. So that when God came and saw this house and saw the blood, he would know that the judgment has already been carried out. The death that was demanded by his justice has already happened. A life has been given for a life. And he would pass over that house, so that the judgment would not fall upon them. The lamb has become the substitute, the one who takes the punishment that that family so richly deserved.

And we know through all of this too, Christians, that God is teaching his people an important lesson, one that we see stretching throughout the Old Testament. Because we see already with Abraham when he sacrifices his son Isaac. He's just about to do it when God stops him and gives him a ram to be sacrificed in his place, a substitute so that Isaac doesn't have to die. One life

given for one life. And I think we can understand that. That makes the most sense to us, to have one given for one, a one to one kind of a thing. But God is teaching us something more. In Exodus 12, here in our reading, the lamb is being given for the guilt of the household. One life for several. So that because this death has already occurred, the judgment passes over this house, and the judgment of the death of the firstborn is not visited upon that family. They are no longer guilty for what they have done. But it goes on beyond that in Leviticus chapter 16 with the scapegoat, where the one goat is given for the whole people of Israel. One life given for many. When the sins of Israel, the sins of all the people, were confessed over the head of this goat, then it was taken out into the wilderness never to be seen again, so that the judgment of God had been fulfilled.

But all of these things, Christians, are looking forward to the one great Lamb, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, our Passover lamb, who gives his life, not just for the few, not just for the many, but one life given for all. So that because of Jesus' death on the cross, the sins of the whole world have been paid. There is no more debt. The guilt has been taken away. And when we believe in Jesus Christ and hold on to him by faith, we are made a new creation. God's justice has been satisfied, and we are now his people forever. Jesus is our Passover lamb, the one who takes away the sins of the world.

And when you come here this evening, Christians, to receive his body and his blood which has been given for you, Jesus is still your Passover lamb. Because Jesus gives us his body to show us that God is no longer angry with us, that God has forgiven us our sins, because our substitute has come to us and died so that we might live. And when we receive his holy blood here at this altar, God is giving us his blood to put upon us and upon the doorpost of our hearts, so that when God sees that blood within us and on us, he will pass us over, and we will not be held liable to the judgment, because the death has already occurred that God's justice demanded. We have been forgiven, Christians, because of what Jesus has done for us as the Passover lamb.

So, come. Take and eat. Receive your Lord's body and blood given for you for the forgiveness of your sins, because Jesus, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed, so let us keep the feast in sincerity and in truth. Confess your sins, and come in true faith, knowing that your substitute has died so that you may live.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son Jesus Christ as the substitute for our sins. We thank you that you have forgiven us for his sake, and we pray that as we receive him this evening in his body and his blood, we may do so in true faith. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.