

Have you ever been disappointed with a meal? I'm not talking about the fries at McDonald's being cold, or the gas station burrito you gambled on for lunch being your day's biggest regret. Those are meals you might expect to be disappointed with. No, I'm talking about being disappointed with a meal you thought would be great. A recipe your friend told you about, or some restaurant that everyone raves about, but the food just wasn't that good. When I vicared in South Carolina, some members once took me out to a fancy steakhouse. As a steak fanatic, I was pumped. But I went away disappointed, because although the meal had so much promise for me, in the end it failed to deliver.

On this Maundy Thursday, we're going to focus on two different meals. The Passover-- instituted by God for the Israelites during their slavery in Egypt, and the Lord's Supper, instituted by Jesus on the first Maundy Thursday. Although these two meals began 1,500 years apart, they're inseparably connected. God instituted both the Passover and the Lord's Supper to be **Meals of Promise**. Not meals that have promise, but fail to deliver. Rather, meals that live up to every promise.

Let's start with the Passover. After Israel had been enslaved in Egypt 430 years, God directed Moses to command the Egyptian Pharaoh to free the Israelites. But Pharaoh wasn't too keen on losing a nation of slave labor. Nine times, God sent powerful plagues against Egypt; destructive plagues like reptiles, insects, disease, and darkness. But nine times, Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to listen to God.

So God promised to send one final plague to deliver Israel from slavery. The Angel of Death would pass through and kill the firstborn in every household in Egypt, including Pharaoh's palace. It would be a horrendous night of death and destruction. Yet, God promised to deliver the Israelites from it... and deliver them through it.

To do so, God ordered each Israelite household to select a lamb or goat from their flocks on the 10th day of the month of Nisan. But not just any animal. It had to be a **"year-old male without defect,"** the most valuable of their flock. For four days, they took special care of that chosen lamb. Then, on the 14th day of the month, **"all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter [their lambs] at twilight."**

After they had slaughtered the chosen lamb, the Israelites were to **"take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses."** God promised, **"When I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."** Any household covered in the blood of the lamb would be "passed over," hence the name. God's promise to deliver Israel required that Passover lamb.

Then the household gathered together to eat the special Passover meal which included unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and the roasted meat of the lamb whose blood covered their doorframes. It was to be a meal of promise.

You might say God made three promises to the Israelites in the Passover. God promised to deliver them from slavery in Egypt, as this heartbreaking plague finally broke Pharaoh's hardened heart so he freed them. God promised to deliver them from the Angel of Death's destruction as he passed over their blood-painted houses. Finally, God was making a promise for their future. The sacrificial Passover lamb was a "type," a picture of the Savior whom God would send to deliver the world from sin. Every promise God made, he kept--through a lamb, connected with a special meal of promise. And he didn't ever want them to forget his faithfulness, commanding the Israelites, **"For the generations to come you shall celebrate [the Passover] as a festival to the LORD."**

And so, 1,500 years after God delivered Israel from Egypt through the blood of a lamb, Jesus-- the ultimate sacrificial Lamb without blemish or defect-- and his disciples obediently celebrated the Lord's Passover meal.

Knowing what the next 24 hours would bring, Jesus made sure he could have one last opportunity to teach his twelve closest disciples. Because he knew Judas was looking for an opportunity to hand him over to the chief priests, Jesus gave secret instructions to Peter and John to go and prepare the Passover meal. Jesus kept the location a secret to Judas, so he wouldn't lead the guards there. This time together was too important to be interrupted, because as they celebrated the Passover meal of promise, Jesus was going to give them a different Meal of Promise.

As Jesus and his twelve disciples gathered around the table for their Passover meal, Jesus shocked them, saying, ***"I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me."***

As if they'd been punched in the gut, each disciple turned sadly to Jesus, begging, ***"Surely not I?"*** They all hoped it wasn't them. But you can almost detect the fear and uncertainty in their question. "What if it is me?" Every one of those disciples could reflect on numerous times they'd failed Jesus. Times he had to rebuke them for their lack of faith, or their misplaced priorities. Times they'd stared at him blankly, again not understanding something he'd taught them. Was it really that far-fetched to think that any of these sinful, stumbling men might be the one to betray Jesus?

And just a few hours later, Judas would betray him. Peter would deny him. And every single one of the men sitting around that table with Jesus would abandon him at the first sign of danger. All of them were undeserving to be recipients of God's promises.

Same with the Israelites who'd received God's promises of deliverance at the Passover. This nation that had so often doubted, given up on, and forgotten about God. Who, almost immediately and constantly after being freed from slavery, complained about and rebelled against the God who'd delivered them. They too were undeserving to receive God's promises.

And if you and I had been sitting around that Passover table with Jesus, we're undeserving too. Like Peter, we've denied Jesus before friends, family, and society to avoid persecution or ridicule. Like Judas, we've "handed Jesus over" for some money, or fleeting moments of pleasure, or the false hope of ignoring our sin. Like the disciples, we've abandoned Jesus at the first sign that following him could be dangerous or difficult. Like the Israelites, we've complained about God's providence, and denied our deliverer. We are completely undeserving of God's promises. Our fearful, uncertain hearts plead, "Surely not I, Lord!" But, yes. It is you, and me. It's every single person. So because we're undeserving of God's promises, does the meal of promise, the Lord's Supper, fail to live up to its promises?

The truth is, God doesn't revoke his promises because we're undeserving. Rather, he makes these promises because we're undeserving sinners who need God's promises of grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Every Israelite deserved to be struck down like the Egyptians firstborn. So did the disciples. So do we. Yet, God passes over, because they were covered with the blood of the sacrificial lamb. Because we're covered with the blood of THE sacrificial Lamb, Jesus. As he said, ***"The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him."*** The prophet Isaiah wrote about the promised Savior, ***"He was led like a lamb to the slaughter."***

As we'll see at the foot of the cross tomorrow on Good Friday, Jesus our sacrificial lamb was led to slaughter. His sinless body paying the wages of sin. His innocent blood painted on the beams of a cross, so forgiveness and salvation are ours. Satan wants us to doubt, "Surely not for me, Lord." Yes. For you. For every single

person. God kept the promise he made to Adam and Eve, through the Lamb. And he connected it with a special meal of promise that does not disappoint.

As he sat around the table with his disciples, he grabbed the unleavened bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. ***“Take it; this is my body.”*** Then taking the cup of wine, he gave thanks, and passed it to them. ***“This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many.”*** In an inexplicable, miraculous way, Jesus gives his true body and blood, the very means of our salvation, for us to eat and drink. As Matthew’s gospel account adds, these are given ***“for the forgiveness of sins.”***

Just like God made three promises in the Passover, he makes three similar promises to us in the Lord’s Supper. By forgiving our sins, God promises to deliver us from slavery-- slavery to sin, death, and the devil. By forgiving our sins, God promises to deliver us from the destruction of eternal death in Hell. Finally, by forgiving our sins, God makes us a promise for the future— that we will eat and drink this feast ***“anew in the kingdom of God.”*** With our sins erased by the ultimate Passover Lamb, God promises to deliver us from the slavery of earthly life, to the Promised Land of Heaven!

In both of these meals of promise, we see God’s grace. In both, we also see God’s wisdom. You see, God created us as a big bundle of nerves with five unique senses. And so God loves to connect his promises to things we can see, smell, taste, touch, and hear. I might trust my dad’s promise to take me to the Super Bowl, but my trust grows stronger when I see the tickets with my eyes and hold them in my hand.

The Israelites could taste the roasted lamb, and see its blood painted on their doorframes. At the Lord’s Supper tonight, you’ll receive Jesus’ body and blood, along with bread and wine that you can see, smell, taste, and touch. God connects his promises to things we can perceive—like meals of promise-- to make them even more vivid. In vivid love, God promises to work salvation, forgive sins, and bring to faith in the waters of Baptism; in body and blood, together with bread and wine, God promises to forgive sin and strengthen faith; in true flesh and blood, true God and true man, God keeps his promises to deliver us through the perfect Passover Lamb.

It’s like one husband telling his wife, “I love you,” and another husband telling his wife, “I love you,” while giving her a kiss, and a bouquet of roses. Both men’s love for their wives is real, but the love of the one is more vivid.

Because of God’s vivid love, we can be certain he’s kept every promise he’s made. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we’ve been delivered through the Lamb, and connected to a special meal of promise. This is my body. This is my blood. For the forgiveness of your sins. If you realize how undeserving you are of God’s promises; if you understand the blessing God gives us in this Supper; if you understand the unity we have in feasting on this meal of promise together, then come. Come, for all is prepared! You will not be disappointed.