

Don't you love listening to someone who is old enough to have seen it all but young enough to tell a great story? That was Moses. He grew up in a palace with a life of privilege; at some point he realized that his birth family was a part of a whole nation enslaved. Identifying with his people and not the Egyptians, he tries to single-handedly right the wrongs of 400 years. At age 40, tough as nails with an attitude and temper to match, he kills an Egyptian apparently with his bare hands. Suddenly the most wanted man in the whole country, he high-tails it to Midian, 400 miles to the east. There for four decades he raises sheep, gets married, has a family, and probably felt that all his big dreams in life would come to nothing. But God appeared to him at the burning bush and at age 80, he sets out for Pharaoh's palace backed by the great "I AM" to lead two million people out of the grips of the strongest nation on earth. Wow, that's a resume'.

When he told a story, people listened. He had seen it all and pretty much he had done it all. Still tough as nails, still with an attitude and a temper to match, Moses stands out as one of those servants of God that's unmatched. But for us tonight, it isn't about his leadership skills, his charisma, his toughness, or his knowledge. No, it's about his *perspective*. After 80 years, Moses had perspective. He could see the big picture.

Tonight that big picture – that perspective – goes from the description of the tenth plague – the start of the Exodus from Egypt in 1446 BC to March 29, 2024. ***Passover Then, Passover Now.***

God aimed the final plague right at Pharaoh. Pharaoh had given government orders to kill the Israelite baby boys. Then when Moses said the God of this universe commands you to let his people go, Pharaoh scoffed and said "Who is this god?!" Now God gives the answer. He's going to show the King of Egypt who the real King is. And every boy who was the firstborn in his family will die, even Pharaoh's son. God gets the last word.

In doing this, God will also show his people – then and now – a shadow and a reality. The shadow was the blood of each lamb. "Paint it on the doorframe!" God told his people. That blood would save them. God was saying that in a house where an innocent sacrificial lamb gave its life, he would look on them with favor, mercy, kindness. This is how the lamb would save them—it would have to die and its blood would keep the people from dying.

Moses had butchered sheep for 40 years. He probably had to put lambs to sleep who were too weak or sick to survive. He had seen sheep killed by coyotes or wolves or bears. But this was different: the lamb to be butchered was to be young, healthy, perfect, a male. Moses could see all the death and the blood around him, not to mention slavery, misery, torment, cruelty, a bad government that persecuted God's people. All that was a direct result of sin. From the painful degrading slavery to every death caused by brutal Egyptian task-masters, long before the book of Romans was written, God's people knew that the wages of sin is death. Where there is sin, there will be death.

This blood of the young lamb was different, not in what it was – it was just blood – but in what it *did*. God brought grace and mercy to an entire nation on a single night, getting those slave-drivers out of their life for good. This act of the bloodshed, covering God's people, would also bring the Israelites into a whole new country – the promised land.

But the lamb which was butchered that night was a shadow, not the real thing.

The real thing – the reality – is the Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Innocent One, perfect, young, a male. He would die to rescue his people.

It's hard to tell exactly how much into the future Moses could see. We can see it so easily. The word "lamb" occurs 39 times in the New Testament and 37 times it's a direct reference to Jesus. ***"The lamb who takes away the sin of the world"*** John the Baptist said (John 1:29). ***"Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed"*** Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 5:7) . ***"A lamb without blemish or defect"*** Peter wrote (1 Peter 1:19). ***"...The Lamb who was slain"*** said angels in heaven (Revelation 5:12). And his blood ***"purifies us from every sin"*** John wrote (1 John 1:7)

The little lamb's blood pointed ahead to the greater Lamb's blood. God passed over the Israelite homes whose doorframes were painted with blood. For them there was no anger, no destroyer, no death, no sadness.

The greater Lamb's blood did even more. Jesus took the blame for each individual human sin. When you look at it that way, his death was not merely physical pain, but filled with the anger of a holy God.

You know the hymn that we sing quite often called "In Christ Alone." It was written in 2001, in Ireland and became popular instantly here in America. But there soon was some controversy. Some American Christian wanted to change some of the words of v.2: "...the wrath of God was satisfied" was changed to "...the love of God was magnified." And they asked the composers of the hymn to accept that change. And the composers said, "NO!" The lyrics remained "...the wrath of God was satisfied" because that is what happened when Jesus died. The Bible teaches that God's anger at mankind's sin was not satisfied by sheep. It required someone greater. The Lamb of God did it.

Moses told the people the lambs were to be butchered on the 14th day of the month of Nisan, but picked out four days earlier on the 10th day of Nisan. Last Sunday you didn't have to pick out a lamb from your friend who's got a few sheep on his back forty or go to lambs.com to get a lamb to sacrifice. No, this past Sunday we saw the Lamb of God go to the city of his crucifixion. Yes, Palm Sunday was exactly four days before Passover. The Lamb didn't have to be dragged to his death. He came to it on his own.

Moses would live another 40 years and see lambs butchered for the Passover meal each year. That would continue for another 1436 years – year after year – until Maundy Thursday. But Jesus was sacrificed once, for all.

Passover then included the most basic staples of life for the Israelites: bread and roast lamb – plentiful, affordable, available. No yeast in the bread because yeast signified corruption and sin and bad stuff that spreads. And roast lamb – from the same lamb that died – they would eat the body of the innocent one that saved them. Saying it that way sounds a little odd, but God told the people to focus on the body of the one who died to save them.

Passover then was a meal of unity, togetherness, with a double direction. God's people first and foremost celebrated the grace of God poured down from heaven onto them. God looked down in mercy and compassion and came up with a rescue from Egypt that no one would have ever dreamed of. And besides that *vertical connection* of gratitude and praise, it was a meal that united God's people – a *horizontal connection*.

So the day before he died, Jesus celebrates this meal prescribed in Exodus 12. At the end of it he said, **"Take and eat, this is my body. Take and drink, this is my blood of the new covenant."** He was turning Passover then into Passover now, the great rescue in Egypt no longer the focus, but turning our attention to the final, ultimate rescue from spiritual and eternal slavery: saving a world of people from their sin and guilt and punishment.

To receive this new covenant meal is to receive forgiveness from Jesus himself. God pulls us up to him. At the same time, God links his people to each other. There is no way you can receive this meal without making a statement of unity with those next to you. **"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf"** (1 Corinthians 10:17). It was a "close" Passover because it was only for the people of God. Today, too, we treasure the closest we can be with Jesus on this earth as an expression of closeness to our brothers and sisters in the faith. The Passover then as well as Passover now tells the story over and over again of how God rescued his people. It tells your children and it tells any guest who happens to be here: This is what Jesus did to save us. It proclaims, the Apostle Paul wrote, Jesus' death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26).

You may recall that right after the first Passover God told the Israelites that all firstborn males were his. They either had to go into service to God full-time or their parents could redeem, or buy them back, with an offering. The reason for this was simple: every single first-born male in every family of that entire nation, was spared that night and given a second chance at life. God wanted the rescued ones set apart for a lifetime of grateful service. For you and me too, we've been spared and given a second chance on life, and we see what Jesus did that night of Passover, and the next day Good Friday, and the Sunday following. His favor and mercy and kindness have been given to us so we, too, would be set apart to serve him.

The one standing in the place of each Israelite family – to save them from certain death – was an innocent lamb. Passover Then.

The one standing in the place of each believer today – to save us from certain death – is the Innocent Lamb. Passover Now.

We will celebrate this in a few minutes. When we do, we will receive once again God's grace, his power to save, his forgiveness, and the promise of life forever with him. And it's all free!

Passover Then was all about a lamb. Passover now is all about THE Lamb, who will strengthen you and preserve you in the true faith until life everlasting. Go in peace. Amen.