

## Sermon April 6, 2023, Maundy Thursday

### Prepared Food: Hezekiah

2 Chronicles 30:1–5, 10–13, 22b–27

Hymns: *LSB* 445, 617

Tonight, we begin the three-day journey which traces our Lord's exodus as he led his people from death to life through the depths of the earth. The memorial each year of the Israelite exodus from Egypt was celebrated by God's people in the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Unfortunately, the Judeans did not always remember the mighty acts of God as they had been instructed. King Hezekiah took the throne after his father Ahaz. For sixteen years, Ahaz reigned and led the people in the abominations, which were hallmarks of the pagan people whom the Lord had driven out in the days of Joshua. Ahaz suffered military defeat and humiliation from all sides. Yet the Scripture says, ***“In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord”*** (2 Chronicles 28:22). Even disaster crashing around him could not bring Ahaz back to God and, in fact, he plundered the house of the Lord and shut up its doors.

So, Hezekiah began his reign and, following his father David, ***“did what was right in the eyes of the Lord”*** (29:2). Right at the beginning of his reign, Hezekiah began to cleanse the temple and restore the service of the house of the Lord. Immediately, King Hezekiah sought to celebrate the Passover.

The invitation was sent to all Israel and Judah to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover. However, there were political and religious difficulties that would delay the celebration and prevent the full gathering of the twelve tribes.

Although Hezekiah invited all Israel, the northern ten tribes had been a separate kingdom for centuries. They had been at war for most of that time, even in the previous administration of Ahaz. Moreover, they rejected Jerusalem as the central place for the worship of the Lord. They had set up high places and altars for themselves, so they didn't need to travel to Judah. Hezekiah's couriers were therefore rejected by most of the people in Israel. ***“Through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, . . . they laughed them to scorn and mocked them”*** (30:10).

Some men from the north humbled themselves and came, but this would not be the reunion of Israel that Hezekiah desired.

Moreover, this Passover was going to be uniquely delayed. Hezekiah and the princes took counsel to keep the feast one month late because not enough priests were consecrated! Even though it is written in Numbers, chapter 9, that an individual who is ritually unclean or on a trip can celebrate the Passover in the second month, this had never applied to the whole people before. And so, it would be like celebrating Christmas in January or the Fourth of July in August.

Remember, Ahaz had closed the temple, so the Judeans hadn't been celebrating the Passover every year as they were commanded. But Hezekiah was eager to hold this feast, so all the preparations were hastily made. Even so, many people, especially the northerners who came, were ritually unclean.

Yet God was evidently pleased by this worship and passed over the irregularity of the ceremonies, giving his grace freely. ***“The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord”*** (30:12).

Even those who came unclean were pardoned by God and healed.

This was a Passover unique in the history of Judah. The assembly rejoiced greatly as in the days of Solomon, and the prayers of the Levites were heard not only in the temple but in the Lord's habitation in heaven. The mighty acts of God's salvation once again were put in central focus as the Judeans, their Israelite brothers, and the sojourners in the land worshiped the one God of heaven and earth who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.

King Hezekiah certainly led the nation to a great revival of faith at this time. However, despite his efforts to follow David, his father, Hezekiah's reforms were short-lived. When Hezekiah's son Manasseh took the throne, he led Judah into degradation and the destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple. This is the natural cycle of the rulers of earth.

The greater Son of Hezekiah will have to do more. Instead of thousands of bulls and sheep, the Son of Man offers his blood as a ransom for many. His flesh is offered up as the Passover Lamb. He is the consecrated priest, wholly by means of himself.

In fact, Jesus was defiled by the priests' standard because he entered Pilate's headquarters.

However, it was not an outward purity that mattered. It was his purity as the unblemished Lamb of God. The Son of Hezekiah didn't need to delay a month to be ready; he was consecrated by the Spirit of the Father to save his people from their sins.

So as the hour drew near for Jesus to give his life, he also celebrated the Passover. Jesus said, "***I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer***" (Luke 22:15). Although he sent Peter and John to prepare the meal, it was clear that Jesus had already done the preparation. Jesus offers his body and blood to them for the forgiveness of sins.

In this last meal before our Lord's death, Jesus changed the Passover forever. It would no longer be a memorial day and feast to recall the final plague and exodus from Egypt. Instead, Jesus says, "***Do this in remembrance of me***" (Luke 22:19). It is the Son of Man who goes according to the plan of God and frees the people of God.

The Son of David gathers his flock from the whole world even as his sacrifice pays for the sin of the world. His invitation goes beyond Jerusalem. His invitation goes beyond Judea. His invitation to this sacrificial feast goes beyond even Samaria, the limit of Hezekiah's couriers. Yes, Jesus sends his invitation to the ends of the earth so that the nations and kings of nations will come to worship him on the throne. He will feed them with the bread of life.

Like Hezekiah, however, Jesus' invitation is not received by all. Jesus was mocked and scorned also not by the Samaritans, but by the Judeans! The King came to Judah, to the temple in Jerusalem itself, and his own did not receive him. Yet in great mercy his invitation spreads near and far, to each of us. His glory has been made known to the nations, and ***“to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”*** (John 1:12). So, a multitude from every nation and tribe is indeed gathered into one family tonight. With one heart we are cleansed by the Spirit of God, worshiping the one Father who is over all, through all, and in all.

The Son of God invites us to worship, not in earthly Jerusalem, but in Spirit and truth. The earthly Jerusalem is a physical and historical place. But true worship happens wherever two or three gather in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. The Passover is celebrated wherever Jesus' flesh is eaten, and his blood is drunk for eternal life in the Son of Man.

Our King and our Lord prepares the table often in the presence of our enemies. As he directed the disciples to the place the Passover would be prepared that holy night in Jerusalem, he has also prepared the feast tonight. And he is not content to give us this Passover remembrance once a year, but at every week. As we do this often, we remember not the Passover and exodus from Egypt, but the Messiah, who gives us freedom and life by his blood. As we do this often, we proclaim the Lord's death and wait for his return in glory.

While our prayers mingle with the prayers of the saints around the world tonight and ascend to our Father in heaven, it is the Lord who descends and enters our mouths to bless us. The Son of Hezekiah has prepared the Passover celebration for us.

So, we hasten to his Passover. The salvation of God is at hand. Come to his table; it is prepared. Come soon and come often.

Whether you've been to Communion every week year after year or whether you've been away for many years like the Judeans in Hezekiah's day, let us rejoice tonight. With the Church around the world and in one heart, we receive the blessings of the Lord.

Amen