**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 3-29-2024
The Festival of Unleavened Bread**

I do not know about you, but I do not mind insects. I just mind when they are in our house. That makes a big difference. I do my best to try to remove them without killing them, but I do not want spiders and ants and various other insects making our house into their home. I want our home to be a place free of insects. I assume you probably have a similar view.

My thinking regarding these insects is that it is best to nip things in the bud before they get too bad. If this is neglected, homes can become infested with different creatures that we don’t want in our homes. The truth is that the more homes or other spaces are neglected, the more difficult and more costly it will be to deal with. We may have to bring in an exterminator to get to the root of the problem.

Tonight, on this Good Friday worship, we are highlighting something far more serious than insects in the home, that needs to be nipped in the bud. This is the danger called sin. This can overcome all of us, unless it is conquered.

This danger of sin is highlighted in the Festival of Unleavened Bread. We have been taking a journey exploring the Jewish calendar in light of Jesus for several weeks now. And each special day has a purpose and there is value in understanding what it is all about.

Now some of these Jewish special days are clustered together very closely. In fact, three of them are clustered together that take place within a few days’ time – Passover, the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Fruit Fruits. They all took place within that same big celebration.

Yesterday, on Maundy Thursday, we looked at Passover. The Passover was to be a reminder of God’s just wrath passing over everyone that had the blood of the lamb on their door frames of their homes. The Passover event each year was to be a reminder to teach the Israelites and all who worship the living God that they needed to trust in Him and in His way to protect them from His righteous justice against sin, just as their ancestors did when God rescued them from Egypt.

But things do not end with Passover. While the Passover was the climactic event that brought Israel out of slavery and into a new beginning as free people, so, this event of Passover is really more of a beginning than an ending.

And God commanded that beginning the day after Passover was the Festival of Unleavened Bread. And in some ways, this time of Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread was to be the holiest time of the year. It was then that they were to remember that they were once slaves, but now are free.

Now what is the focus of this Festival of Unleavened Bread? Why did God think it was a good idea and command the people of Israel to celebrate it? And just as important for us to consider today is, how does this relate to Good Friday?

The Festival of Unleavened Bread was to be a week-long celebration. In light of God’s supernatural deliverance of them from slavery, it was to be a time of worship and celebration and giving thanks.

And also, as you may have figured out from the name of this festival, during this special week they were to only have unleavened bread. In other words, they were to only have bread made without yeast.

But why the removal of yeast? Was God against yeast? No. Yeast is a fine ingredient. They were not prohibited from eating yeast throughout the year, like they were with the other dietary restrictions that the LORD gave Israel.

So why was yeast a no-no through the week following Passover? I believe that there are two important reasons.

First, it was a reminder of how the people of Israel had to leave Egypt quickly. Leaven takes some time to have its effect in baking. And the lack of leaven was meant to be a reminder that they left Egypt in haste. It would help the generations to remember the event, even though they did not live through it themselves. It would be a physical reminder in their diet for that week of what God had done for them by His grace. And it would remind them that God called them to swiftly respond to His God’s gracious actions toward them as the Israelites swiftly left Egypt in the middle of the night. The dietary change was a sign for them. It was a reminder of what God had done.

And second, the lack of leaven was meant to symbolize getting sin out of their lives. In the Bible, leaven is often associated with sin. This does not mean there is anything sinful in and of itself with leaven. But leaven rises and grows. Leaven has an impact on everything connected to it.

I think of Jesus’ parable of the yeast. In Matthew 13:33, Jesus states, **“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”**

Yeast is a type of leaven. This example of Jesus uses leaven in a positive way. He is comparing the kingdom of heaven to yeast or leaven. He is saying that when God’s kingdom gets in someone, it will impact everything in one’s life. In other words, when someone truly says yes to following Jesus, it will affect every part of their life. How we view others. How we treat others. How we see ourselves. How we see God. What we do when no one is looking. All of these things are profoundly affected when the kingdom of heaven gets within someone.

This truth, unfortunately, also works the other way. When sin gets in someone, it will grow and spread and impact everything.

An example of Jesus using yeast or leaven in a negative way is from Luke 12:1. He says, **“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”**

So here yeast is associated with this sin of hypocrisy that many of the Pharisees sadly had growing in their lives. Their hypocrisy would be a yeast that impacted how they viewed others as below them. It impacted how they became prideful and how they were envious of Jesus and the attention that He was receiving.

And Jesus tells His disciples we’re to guard themselves against it. Guard yourselves against the yeast or leaven of hypocrisy, because it would have produced many destructive things in them.

And so, back to the Festival of Unleavened Bread, God commands the people of Israel to remove all leaven for a week because it was a symbol of sin. The LORD was essentially telling them, I have sovereignly rescued you from slavery and have chosen you to be my people. So chose to get sin completely out of your lives right off of the bat. They were to be intentional in seeking to nip willful sin in the bud.

The LORD wanted Israel to guard themselves against sin. If they were to live successfully as God’s covenant people and to be the light to the nations that they were called to be, they needed to take sin seriously and chose to not give it a place in their lives.

So, what does this all mean for us, especially on Good Friday? Our biblical passage for tonight will help us to see this more clearly. I invite you to please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 5:6-8: **6Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? 7Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**

In this passage, the Apostle Paul is writing to the Christians of Corinth. When we read of the Book of Acts, we see that Paul played a big role in the growth of the church there in Corinth.

But sadly, these Christians do not seem to be maturing in the faith very quickly. And one of the reasons for their stunted growth is that they do not seem to be taking sin very seriously.

Corinth was a proud city. Boasting about this or that was the norm in that setting. But that should never be the norm for the church.

And interestingly, Paul uses language here that speaks about Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. He tells them ‘Your boasting is not good.’ And he then writes to them about how they should know how a little yeast leavens the whole batch. In other words, a little bit of boasting will have its effect on the entirety of someone.

Paul tells them to get rid of the old yeast so that you may be a new unleavened batch. Now Paul, of course, is not speaking about recipes here. Rather, he is telling them to get this sinful action out of their lives and instead, replace it will good godly yeast, or healthy, godly actions.

Paul tells them that they really are the new unleavened batch. This means that they really are new creations through Jesus Christ. But they needed to live accordingly.

But what had changed? Paul is very clear here. He says, **“Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.”**

Again, we think of the original Passover, where God brought freedom for Israel from slavery. And because they were free, the Festival of Unleavened Bread was to remind them that they were called to live fully for God and to not let sin have a place in their lives.

And this same truth is what Paul is telling the Christians of Corinth. Christ offered himself as the Passover Lamb for all of them. God’s just wrath would pass over these believers of Corinth because they have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

But the Corinthian Christians were not to stop there, but to be intentional in taking sin seriously and getting it out of their lives. Paul tells them they need to remove malice and wickedness from their lives. These would be examples of negative leaven.

And instead, they were to seek to focus on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Friends, here we are on Good Friday. We call it Good because Jesus, our Passover Lamb, was sacrificed for us. He bore God’s just wrath against our sin for us.

But where do we go from here? The Festival of Unleavened Bread should remind us that an essential part of living as God’s covenant people is to take sin very seriously. Yes, we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. But we are told elsewhere in the New Testament that we are not to give the devil a foothold. If you give him an inch, he will take a mile, so to speak.

This Festival of Unleavened Bread should remind us that our daily living matters a great deal. Even though we have been saved by God’s grace through the sacrifice of Jesus, we have a choice to make each day. Do we choose to eat of the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth and goodness and humility and mercy and other godly traits? Jesus did not go through all that He went through for us for Christians to go on living as they did before they came to know Christ. Christians are not to live just like the people of this world.

As Christians, we are of course, not required to literally remove all leaven from our house for a week. It was an object lesson for Israel. But this festival can and should serve as a reminder that we must take sin seriously and not give a place for it in our lives.

Friends, so many people are turned off to Christianity, not because of Jesus or the Bible, but because they see hypocrisy in the lives of Christians. So, choosing to be intentional in guarding ourselves from the leaven of sin is hugely important, not only for our own walk with Christ, but also in our witness to others.

We now live in a time where it seems fewer and fewer people are reading. Everything is visual – movies, videos. Most people, especially most unchurched people, are not reading the Bible. May people see godly leaven, leaven of the kingdom of heaven in us – in our words, in our actions, in our sincerity, in our love for truth. And may they be drawn to Christ, the one who died for them, just as much as He died for us – on Good Friday. Truly, as we do this, we will be, more and more the light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus Christ.

Let’s pray…

Resources:

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

<https://www.lehigh.edu/~gdb0/simcha/firstf00.htm>

<https://cbnisrael.org/2023/04/05/passover-the-feast-of-unleavened-bread-2/>