

Examine And Come Out

Accepting God's Changes in Us
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Last Sabbath we saw two of several points that I feel are very important areas that need critical examination at Passover time in order to take Passover with a proper sense of both appreciation and understanding. Appreciation and understanding at Passover does not exhaust their usefulness, because these are also areas in which it is essential that we grow. When we examine ourselves we are also at the same time evaluating our progress in these areas in order to grasp what it is that we must do to improve, and it is in this life that they become subjects for the Days of Unleavened Bread.

With Passover, the shortcomings and failures to meet the standard are covered, and the ultimate penalty for falling short is completely and totally muted, because the death penalty is removed. If we understand God's purpose, then, with the Days of Unleavened Bread comes the understanding of what our responsibility is toward God in these areas. What are we to do about them? The examination for Passover gives us the point of attack. The Days of Unleavened Bread supply us with direction as to what we are to do. Attack them! Come out of them. Overcome them. Begin with resolving to be more yielded, that we might be yet more in the image of God.

Two times Paul wrote that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." The examination for Passover reveals the leaven, and leaven is a destroyer, but it is a unique destroyer because it is also sometimes useful. But once it invades, it grows, and it grows and it grows until it inhabits *all*, and destroys its very host.

Under natural circumstances, leaven cannot be removed, but our miracle-working God can remove its spiritual counterpart "sin" from our lives. Our goal is to work with God—to stop it in its tracks. God is *totally unleavened*, and I do not mean that there ever was a time that He was leavened. He is that way because He is sinless. He is holy. He is our ideal. He is our standard. He is the image that we are being conformed to, and our goal is to grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. There is our direction.

When Israel came out of Egypt, they knew where the Promised Land was in relation to Egypt, but they did not know the way that God was going to lead them, and that is one of the reasons why it specifically says that He did not take them the way that was clearly shortest, lest they see war and become discouraged. You see, God had much more in mind than merely getting them into the Promised Land, so be forewarned.

Do we send our children to school just so that they are able to say that they went through twelve grades, so they can say, "We did it"? Well, so it is with us. God is very interested that we learn the processes of what produces right, and what produces wrong. God had much more in mind than merely getting them there, and so we know that where we are headed is the Kingdom of God, but we do not know the exact path that God is going to lead us on, and as with Israel, our path is sinuous, sometimes weaving in directions that we do not understand. This is why yielding to Him on a daily basis is so important. He *knows* where He is headed. We look through a glass darkly. We *must* use our faith.

What I am giving you in these two sermons are broad areas that are essential to stay on the path while we meet the daily challenges of more specific characteristics God is either trying to build into or eradicate from our character. Each of the broad points I am giving you in these two sermons contains many specific elements within them that can be covered by other sermons, but these are areas that need to be kept in mind all throughout the year.

The first one covered involved the use of our faith in God on a daily basis. Enoch walked with God. It briefly means that he included God intimately in every part of his life. God was not departmentalized as only pertaining to a couple of hours each Sabbath, but was "invited" by Enoch into, and involved by Enoch in, everything. The reason was that Enoch *really* wanted to be in God's image. He loved what God is, and he wanted to be near God. You cannot get much closer than the imagery of "walking" with somebody, "living" with somebody, living life intimately with them. He wanted to see and do everything like God.

This is how we glorify Him, and so we must seek reinforcement of our faith by using it, and looking for more confirmation of Him in our life and in the lives of others, and also by looking at His creation and learning of Him there. This is how faith strengthens and grows. At the foundation of this point is that faith arises from the "Word of God." We will leave that there, as that is the end of Point 1.

The second point was that we must not neglect what we are now. Never forget it. We are co-heirs with Christ of the promises given to Abraham. We are "*in Christ*," and we are "sons of God." This awesome privilege came to us without our bidding. It just fell into our lap so to speak, because God, by His grace chose to do so. To serve as a reminder, I will just read this scripture in Romans 9 that we went through the last time.

Romans 9:15 For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.

It is completely and totally within the mind of God who it is He chooses to share His glory in this first resurrection.

Romans 9:16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

These first two points are major, major players in determining the degree of our success in this way of life. This is because this is what we believe the word of Christ tells us, and second, because we now have a positive direction for our lives, and that is something that is above and beyond something or anything that is merely material and temporal. We are going to add a bit more to this second point, and I want you to turn with me to I Peter 2.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

I Peter 2:11 Beloved, I beg you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

We are not merely tourists meandering through life. We are very "special" people, chosen of God. We have a special responsibility and a special goal. We are no better than others, but we are justified, and we are being sanctified through God's calling and Christ's sacrifice. I want you to see here the way in which Peter builds upon what we have become as a result of God making this choice. Look in verse 9 again. That is what Peter says we are. We are "a chosen generation." This is very interesting because it fits right into the context back in Isaiah 43, and I feel sure this is where Peter drew this from.

Isaiah 43:10 "You are My witnesses," says the LORD, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me."

The context continues, but we are going to drop down to verse 20. In that intervening time God gets around to saying about what is going to happen in the future, i.e. from the time that He uttered this statement through Isaiah.

Isaiah 43:19 "Behold, I will do a new thing . . ."

Isaiah 43:20-21 "The beast of the field will honor Me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen. This people have I formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise."

That is us! Within the spirit of verse 10, we fit there. We are God's witnesses, and we are God's chosen—this "new" thing that He is forming.

Now back to I Peter 2. Other translations use the term *race*, rather than the word *generation*. "You are a chosen race." In that sense *race* means that we have a common ancestor. All Israelites have a common ancestor in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but our common ancestor, because of what God has done, is God Himself, and we were *specifically* chosen by Him. It was not a matter of the accidental combining of genes. It is like that comment you hear adoptive parents saying to their adoptive children. "Mommy and daddy picked you out. We *chose* you." That is literally what happened to us. Out of all the people on the face of the earth, God chose us. The Bible even uses the term *adopted*, which we understand in its Roman use, which made a person a full-fledged son of the person who adopted, and that is what happened to us, and now we have been impregnated with the mind of God as well.

But God specifically chose us, and as we saw, it was not on the basis of anything that we had done. We had done nothing to earn it, and Paul gives the illustration with Jacob and Esau, that God chose Jacob over Esau even before they had ever even done a thing. So whatever reason it was that God chose you and me, it was completely within His mind, and we will never know. We have to accept it on that term, but look at what this has done to you and me! What a unique individual you are, chosen of God to bear His name! Carry that with you. It is a proud name, and I do not mean in the sense of "puffed up." I mean a name that is *glorious*—"sons of God."

Peter also says that we are a "royal priesthood." A priest is a teacher of a way of life. I like the Latin of this word. It is *pont*, or *pontiff*, and it means *a builder of bridges*. So in Latin "priest" means "a builder of bridges." It is an apt description, because that is what a priest does. A priest builds bridges between people and their God so that there is a common ground between the two of them. We are a *royal* priesthood. Priests are something that are common to virtually every religion, but there is

something different about this priesthood. It is holy. That is what makes the difference. It is not an ordinary one.

Hebrews 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

Of course it follows that those who are working under a high priest are going to be sitting with him, assisting him in his responsibilities, and so we offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin, and we do things in relation to God and men; bring them together.

Hebrews 5:2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.

How about you and me? A royal priesthood, but are we subject to weakness? Can we relate to the weaknesses of others? We had better be able to.

Hebrews 5:3-4 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

That too includes us in principle. Were we called of God to be a royal priesthood? Yes, we were, and we did not take the honor upon ourselves. It fell into our lap.

Hebrews 5:5 So also Christ glorified not Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him, "You are My Son, today have I begotten You."

We share in this responsibility with our King-Messiah, who is High Priest, and we are called to an eternal abiding priesthood, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of the royal eternal Christ, who is of the rank of Melchizedek. That is the priesthood of which we are a part, and it is holy.

Peter uses the same description in saying that we are a holy nation. This also was spoken of in the past in the book of Isaiah in chapter 62.

Isaiah 62:11-12 Indeed the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world: "Say to the daughter of Zion [the church], 'Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him' And they shall call them, The Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.

The church is also referred to as "Jerusalem."

Isaiah 66:8 Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? [Yes!] For as soon as Zion was in labor, she gave birth to her children [the holy nation].

Right now, as it were, we are in the womb. We know that is not literally true, but we are being formed and shaped. We are being made holy through sanctification, through growth in the Spirit of God, coming to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. A nation consists of citizens who reside in a given locale. They obey the rules of that community, and they cooperate for the well-being of that society.

Peter has taken the political aspect of this out of the picture by combining "nation" with "holy." We know from Paul's writings that our citizenship and society is in heaven, and our common characteristic is Christ, the Holy Spirit, and hopefully brethren, character. We have been set apart for service to God. Never forget that. This is part and parcel of the guiding beacons that need to be within our understanding and vision *every day* of our life, not just at Passover time, not just during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Finally, Peter says there in I Peter 2 that we are a people "belonging" to God. A very interesting thought, because we are aware of the term "redeemed," that we have been "bought." At one time we were under the ownership of Satan the Devil, but here in Acts 20 Paul said to the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood."

Throughout the ages God has claimed people for His own, and this is what ultimately makes us different and sets the demands of our lives. It may not seem like very much on the surface, but we differ from the nations of this world because of this. God *owns* us. We are not our own. We are slaves, and a slave in its ultimate description is a person who does not have control of his life. Our lives belong to someone else.

But on the other hand, because of what God has done, we are independent of nationalistic ties, and really brethren, we are independent of ethnic ties, racial ties, fraternal ties, except in terms of our ownership at the hands of God. God wants us to *sever every tie* that we have with this very world into which were born. I think you understand what I am talking about here, because literally we still have our families and so forth to take care of, but I want you to see the ultimate of this. Our calling is to show forth God's virtues, power, wisdom, grace, mercy, and love by our conduct. We cannot really, fully appreciate "this way" unless we realize what this has opened up to us.

I John 3:1-3 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure.

There, in very simple terminology, is our marching order. You can see the importance of this point in light of that final statement there. We are owned of God. We are the children of God, and because of these things, we are to purify ourselves, even as He is pure. We are to become "holy." So this has to be factored into our understanding. We must be mindful of our *awesome* status, and I mean awesome! There is no reason why any of us need feel like we just crawled out from under a rock. Yes, there are times that we feel guilty, and there are times that we get discouraged, but brethren, because of what we are, we should never stay that way, because to stay that way is to deny what God has done for us, and it is awesome. This is the end of Point 2.

Now Point 3. Another factor that we need to carry with us all the time is we are not to forget what we were. We are not to forget what we were.

We will go to I Peter again, in chapter 2 and verse 10. I jumped over this when I was here before.

I Peter 2:10 Who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

The purpose for this point is to make sure that we are not "that" anymore! A great deal of motivation springs forth from not allowing something painful or frightening to ever happen again.

Tell me something. Have you ever fallen asleep while driving, at least momentarily? When you fall asleep, you are not even aware that it has happened. I do not think those virgins in Matthew 25 were aware that they fell asleep, until the alarm went off: "The bridegroom comes!" They were not aware they were asleep. You were not aware that you were asleep when the church started flying apart, but there is a scripture testifying against this that we all fell asleep.

If anybody has driven a car and has fallen asleep, what happens? When that right front tire goes off the pavement and goes onto the berm and starts bumping along there, and you go from rut to rut, you are shockingly jolted awake! **Boom!** I know it has happened to me, and my skin crawls and my hair stands on end, and what do I immediately do? I immediately begin to take corrective measure that that never happens again, and I whip that car back onto the pavement, while I am shaking. You roll down the window to get a blast of cold air. You crank up the radio volume so that it is blasting in your ears. You start singing maybe at the top of your lungs. You ask somebody else in the car to please talk to you and keep you busy, to help keep your eyes open so you do not fall asleep.

I do not want to go back to what I just was, and what I just did, and so it gives me plenty of motivation to not have it happen again. That is what this point is about, that every once in awhile we have to think about what we *were*, and what we have become, and what has happened between.

Directly tied to this is something else. It is a bit of understanding, that the value of a thing very frequently lies in who possesses it, or who possessed it. We just read that we are owned by God. Recall how much people are willing to pay for trivia that belonged to the Kennedys. I mean like golf clubs that sold for five thousand dollars, or whatever it was, or a purse that they probably threw out and they got a couple of thousand dollars for it. That kind of stuff.

We have national monuments of homes that were once possessed by famous people. In fact, not very far from where I am standing right now is the log cabin birthplace of James K. Polk, the eleventh President of the United States. I visited the Mount Vernon home of George Washington, and Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, and the Hermitage, the home of Andrew Jackson just outside of Nashville. All of them are landmarks because of *who* owned them. One of the things that Peter is teaching us in the context here is that our value now lies in the fact that *God owns us*. It is He who dwells in us, but there was a time when He did not. We are the beginning of a prophecy that He made all the way back in the book of Hosea.

Hosea 1:9-10 Then said God, "Call his name Lo-Ammi, for you are not My people, and I will not be your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are the sons of the living God.' "

Hosea 2:23 "Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they shall say, 'You are my God.' "

Once, brethren, we were **not** His people, but now we have **become** His people. What we see here is the beginning of an obvious reference to our past.

Now turn with me to Ephesians 2, to some very familiar scriptures that we go over very frequently, but nonetheless they fit here and they're good to review.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you [the church] He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, just as the others.

Ephesians 2:11-12 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

All of us were Satan's possession, and through sin we showed our subjugation to him. All of us were spiritual Gentiles, but we have received mercy. The basic idea that underlies sin is failure. It is the failure to live up to an ideal.

Falling asleep while you are driving is a failure to live up to a standard, and it can damage and destroy very quickly. Sin is our failure to glorify God, to glorify our Owner. It too kills, but not always as quickly as in an automobile accident. When we were in this state before, we had antagonistic, anti-God, grasping, self-centered, aggressive, obstinate, proud, arrogant, insecure, restless, and competitive attitudes. We were everything but the image of our innocent, easily-approached-to, never-too-busy, childlike God. We were like the fool in Psalm 14 who said in his heart "There is no God," that God is not in all our thoughts.

At that time the world was our treasure, and our vision was in that direction. Our major concern or consideration was the gratification of our senses, and vanity. Whatever it was, we wanted to do it. We cared for the things of the flesh, and flesh in its broadest sense is anything in us which gives sin its chance to break forth and dominate.

I wonder if you understand that this is what is keeping the church apart, keeping it divided. There are some people out there who are propounding all kinds of doctrinal corrections that they are demanding to see made, and seemingly forgetting that for fifty years the church was blessed while it was using the doctrines that they want to change. Now I say this because those doctrines seem to have been acceptable to *God*, but these same people—and again I do not think that they realize it—are continuing the same trend begun by the Tkachs and their staff. The only difference is the specific doctrines that they want to see changed.

Part of the argument they use is, "We can always become more doctrinally pure, can't we?" That at first sounds good, until you stop to think that it was doctrinal changes that were used to tear us apart. It does not compute. What that means is that the new doctrines are not producing a faith that will unify us. I mean the doctrines that were produced by the Tkachs. It blew us apart. It did not unify us. It blew us apart, and if we keep making doctrinal changes, does it not follow that we will continue to split? This is why that simple advice in Jude is so good. "Go back to the faith which was once delivered." That is what unified us. If we want to be unified, you have to go back to what united us in the *first* place. "Go back to your first love!", Jesus said to the Ephesian church. It is basically the same concept.

If a couple is having trouble with their marriage, you go back to what brought you together in terms of attention, devotion, and even the things that you did. Doctrinal changes are only going to produce more division. So, they seem to think that if we can just get this certain doctrine changed, everybody will unify. But again, as I said, that is not what drove us apart. What drove us apart, at the very base of it, is that we have not yet even gotten out of the sandpile in terms of our love for God and for each other.

I want you to think of this. The letter to the Laodiceans shows that as a church, our lives were heavily tilted to be centered on ourselves and this world, but lukewarm toward God, and that is what Laodiceanism is. It is being passive and lukewarm within a relationship. If you love someone very deeply, but they were at best lukewarm toward you, how would you feel? You would feel that you were the victim of unrequited love, and I will tell you, it would frustrate you.

Well, God spit us out of His mouth. Do you get the point? The effect of Laodiceanism is to create relationship problems. There is the problem with the church. The world is sadly divided, sadly, badly, irreparably divided, and as elements of the church head in that direction, their unity is going to be with what they came out of, and the only hope of unity with the church is for it to go *back* to what brought it together in the first place, and that includes with it an intensity of devotion to God. In fact that will be the foundation of it which will lead us in the right doctrinal direction.

Turn with me to I Peter 4 as we continue this point about remembering what we were.

I Peter 4:3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles . . .

That is understandable because that is what we did when we were in the world. We worked the will of the unconverted because we were owned by Satan.

I Peter 4:3-4 —when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them to the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

We were subject then to human nature, and we had little recourse but to go where it pulled us, that we spent enough time doing that. Each of these terms that Peter uses are broad categories and include many specifics within them. We are not going to go through those things, but just a brief definition of lewdness, or licentiousness, or debauchery as another Bible may translate it. It means "license." It means "without restraint." Very frequently it is applied to sexual sins, but it cannot be limited to that because there are people who may have no problem at all with sexual sins, but they give themselves liberty to sin in other areas. That is just the way human nature works. It involves itself in carousing or

orgies, carousing being a drinking party, not necessarily excessive, but to have the potential, and orgies being a riotous process under the influence of alcohol or music. At the time that Paul or Peter was writing this, it was usually in honor of Bacchus. Idolatry in this context indicates the worship of the created at the expense of God.

When we change, brethren, the important thing is we become alien to those who were formerly our friends, the people that we did things with before, and they begin to withdraw from us. We are withdrawing from what they do. We may not want to withdraw from them, but because we no longer do what they do, the companionship begins to disintegrate, and because we refuse to be sociable with them as we formerly were, the chances are very great that at the very least our friends will think it strange of us, and at the worse, they will heap abuse upon us.

Now Peter, at the very beginning of this letter said:

I Peter 1:13-16 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy; for I am holy."

Let us change this into more modern terminology. Peter said, "Prepare your mind for action. We can't afford to daydream. The battle is on. Steady your mind. Don't let fear or worry hinder your mind. Roll up your sleeves and get working, because carnality is very much alive after baptism, and time keeps moving on. Be self-controlled. Avoid rashness and confusion. Set your hope in God's grace and don't allow yourself to be re-conformed to this world."

Human nature is like a spring that must be kept suppressed, and if it is not kept suppressed it will lead us right back to actively and continuously sinning, and we will never be holy, and so as Paul said in Romans 12:1-2, and as translated in the *Phillips Translation* as really graphic: "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. Be different."

How are we to be different? We're to follow the advice, the commands of Jesus Christ, and He said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." In preparing this sermon I found in a commentary something that I thought was kind of interesting, because apparently this statement here can be translated in another way. The *King James* translators chose to translate it in the form of a command. "If you love Me, keep my commandments." There is nothing wrong with that, but it is also capable of being said, "If you love Me, you *will* keep My commandments." There is a difference. One is a declarative, the other is a command. The one is predicting, or showing, or foretelling that if love is there, *we will submit to Him*, and the other side of that coin is, if love is *not* there, we will reveal it by *not* submitting to Him. So take your pick. Either one of them is correct apparently, and as far as I am concerned, one is as good as the other.

Now drop down to verse 23. Notice what this says. This reinforces that alternate translation that I gave you for verse 15.

John 14:23-24 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word [thus revealing that he really does love Christ]; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me."

Brethren, considering who owns us, who we were, and who we are now, it would be unworthy of us to be actively participating in sin and not really sacrificing ourselves to overcome it, and thus dishonoring our owner Jesus Christ by being unwilling to suffer in order to overcome, even as He did. How frequently and how intensively is the old man still dominating us? In order to answer this question, we have to think back, not forgetting what we were, because it gives us a clue of what we are now.

Another reason, another principle to think upon, and that is to realize what it took to provide this way.

I Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

This is an explanatory statement that is preceded by a number of examples given by Paul, extracted from the children of Israel's journey through the wilderness, and it says that all of these things happened unto them for examples, and we are thus to learn from them. We can look at this by saying that all of this happened for *us* upon whom the ends of the ages are come.

Think back for a little bit, just about, let us say, one narrow area of what happened for us, and is part of the cost of what it took to provide this way of life. Remember, God in His wisdom is the One who has marched mankind, and most specifically the Israelitish people, through the paces, and inspired His prophets to record what occurred. What was recorded then came down to us, that God was marching these people through their history and writing it down for you and me what happened to them.

Well, just in the matter of the sacrifices, how many animals were sacrificed in the history of Israel from the time that they left Egypt until the time that they went into captivity, when the Jews finally went into captivity, returned from captivity, and then came back to Jerusalem, up until 70 AD? How many animals were sacrificed in order to portray to you and to me, and eventually to all of mankind, that there is no forgiveness by the shedding of the blood of an animal? From these things very much can be learned about the principle of sacrifice and what it will produce, as well as giving us instruction on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting, because God could have just simply written it down and handed the book to Abraham, but He chose not to do it that way. He made those people go through the experiences, and then wrote down what happened. There is a true witness in the history of Israel of what any carnal-minded person would have done in that circumstance, and that includes you and me. There was a tremendous expenditure of time and energy and life of men and animals to give us eternal lessons in sacrifice, and that is not all. That is only one part of the history of Israel.

How much is written to show us how important it is to have the divine nature rather than to be operating on human nature, to be circumcised in heart rather than just in the flesh, to have the eyes of the understanding open, rather than be blind? We could go on and on and see how awesome the expenditure that God has made of His creation so that we can understand. Can we appreciate that? Can we appreciate all of this so that we can understand human nature, the divine nature, make right choices and applications, and have salvation?

Romans 15:4 says virtually the same thing, but in a little bit different wording.

Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our [the church's] learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

He puts a little bit different twist on it there, but all those things that happened before were written so that we would have an awesome goal and have our lives filled with hope and encouragement and joy and peace, not because of what we are going through, but because of what lies ahead. These things are to give us direction. God has paved the way so that we would be well-equipped, but look at what He had to do to pave the way.

There are people in the world who look at this point, maybe not as finely as we are doing here, but they look at the overall principle and they come to the conclusion that God is cruel and heartless. They do not understand the second resurrection. They do not understand that all men are going to have an opportunity for salvation, but God in His wisdom chose to not give it to them *then*, but He has chosen to give it to us now.

Do we appreciate it? Are we aware at all of the awesome expenditure of time and energy and life so that we can see the *good* examples of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and the *bad* examples of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob? And so with David, and so with Samuel, and so with Moses, and so with Ezra and Nehemiah, and on and on it goes, that you might have comfort and hope in the Scripture. Certainly there are difficulties associated with this way of life, but there is no prize, no goal, no success in any endeavor to even begin to compare with what lies at the end of this opportunity.

Look at Hebrews, chapter 11, the example of Moses, who certainly seemed to have a wonderful material physical future before him.

Hebrews 11:24-27 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

Moses looked beyond his personal trials, his own personal power, position, wealth, acclaim, and notoriety, and he did not treat his calling unworthily, but became certainly one of the greatest of God's servants. We have the example of Christ as well in Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses . . .

It was not just Moses. It was all of these who looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. So he says:

Hebrews 12:1 . . . let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Something that we heard in the sermon this morning by Richard is the same kind of advice given to us by James.

Hebrews 12:2-3 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become wearied and discouraged in your souls.

So Jesus too looked beyond, and He considered what had been given to Him, considered what it took to provide this way, that He did not want to let God down, and He did not want to let that great cloud of witnesses down, and neither should we, because they did what they did, as Peter put it, *not understanding what they were going through*, but God gave them enough of an insight or a vision to be able to see that they were doing it for somebody who would come along later, and they did it. "Close the books." "Seal it," the angel said to Daniel. "It's closed to the end." What a disappointment that must have been to him, but he did it in a good attitude for you and me. He was not going to be told, and that was it. He knew his owner was God, and so he accepted it and went on.

Now go to Galatians chapter 2, beginning in verse 16.

Galatians 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

I read this because He too has preceded us. He too was part of the cost, the biggest part, the greatest one, and His life and death outweighed all the others put together, and this is the only means by which we can have that awesome future that lies before us. This that He did is the only means by which we can have opened up to us a way of life, an abundant life, that applies even here and now so that we can live it in a way far superior than we ever would have lived life otherwise.

Galatians 2:17-18 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore the minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

Do not go back!

Galatians 2:19-21 For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness come through the law, then Christ died in vain.

"Justified" means "to align." It means "to declare right or innocent." It is a judicial declaration in this case, and it does not in itself suggest any kind of a change of behavior. It does not happen automatically, but through the faith in Christ's blood that comes by the hearing of it.

The other night we were in Hebrews 9, talking about or at least mentioning Christ's death, His blood:

Hebrews 9:11-14 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered in once into the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh [or physical things], how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

What does that mean to you to have a conscience *cleansed* from guilt? That is part of what it takes to provide this way, and so we need to relate to Christ's part in this, and all that preceded us to make it possible for us to be in this position, but especially to Jesus Christ and what His sacrifice means to us personally. It is a unique singular sacrifice of a singular unique God-Man, and by it we are redeemed.

Redemption is the process of setting free by the payment of a price. Not only are we set free by Christ's sacrifice, but we also find that His sacrifice purges our spirit, our attitude, so that our very conscience is cleared. Do you realize that was not so with ancient Israel? David said in Psalm 51 that God did not desire bulls and goats, because those things do not clear the conscience, so the Israelites could come away from their sacrifices filled with doubtful distrust that God would forsake them and not forgive them. We do not have to feel that way because of what has preceded us in this way.

Brethren, we have been caught up in the awesome design of a great Creator, who was watchfully overseeing every operation to secure its success. As I mentioned last night, "The Night To Be Much Observed" can easily be translated "The Night of Watching," but it is not *our* watching. It is observing with joy that *God* is carefully watching to ensure the safety of His people, even as He watched when they came out of Egypt. It is noting with joy that God will abundantly supply whatever is needed for our liberty and salvation. Everything! Paul said, "What shall we say then, to a God who has not even withheld His own Son?" That is what it took to put us in this position, and we must never forget that. It is always to be part and parcel of our thinking.

As we close, let us just review those points.

1. Believe that God is, and be looking often for positive reinforcement.
2. Understand what we are now.
3. Remember what we were.
4. Reflect *often* on the awesome cost that it took to provide this way.

I hope that you have a very successful conclusion to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We have just begun it now. We hope you have a very fine week, and that it is a week of growth in understanding and in overcoming as we keep this year's Days of Unleavened Bread.