

It was the middle of the night, but this was no ordinary night. Mom and dad, the two children, and grandma who lived with them were all wide awake and fully dressed and gathered in the living room. Seconds seemed like hours as they waited. And waited. And waited. Till finally it began. Far off in the distance, faint but clear, a single cry pierced the night. “No!!! No!!!” Before long the single cry had become a chorus of cries, until finally it seemed as if the whole countryside were screaming and wailing. The angel of death was passing through the land and no Egyptian home was left untouched. Every firstborn child in Egypt was lying on a bed or slumped in a chair or collapsed on the ground - lifeless.

But in this household of five, there was no grief-stricken cry. Maybe they were nervous, maybe the adrenaline was starting to pump through their bodies, but their bodies were definitely all alive. Of all the houses in Egypt that night, there was only one thing that distinguished an Egyptian home from an Israelite home. A lamb had been slaughtered and eaten as part of the meal earlier that evening, its blood painted on the exterior door frames of the house, and the angel of death had seen that blood and passed over that house. He had, in fact, passed over every Israelite house. It held true for every household throughout an entire nation, even down to their very stables and barns – without the blood of the lamb, there was only death.

A year later that same family was together in the Sinai Peninsula. They had seen the waters of the Red Sea divide before their eyes. They had watched in horror and amazement as the presence of God shook the mountain, after which Moses came down with the Ten Commandments. On the first anniversary of their departure from Egypt they relived that night from a year ago, slaughtered lamb and all. Years later, as that anniversary came around again, when children asked their parents what this special meal was all about, they were told, “It’s the Passover sacrifice to the Lord. He spared us from death that night and delivered us from slavery in Egypt.” They were not to forget.

It was the middle of the night, but this was no ordinary night. Jesus and all of his disciples except one were gathered as the Israelites had been instructed to gather each year for the Passover meal. As was always the case, it was as if the twelve of them were in Egypt again, even though they were sitting in a room in Jerusalem. The bread made without yeast, the bitter herbs, wine and the lamb, which had been slaughtered and roasted over a fire, were all on the table again. They were to remember how they [their ancestors] had walked out of Egypt without having to wield a single weapon. What was it about that blood painted on the doorposts all those years ago that allowed all those people to escape death and leave Egypt for the Promised Land?

Many lambs had been slaughtered in those years since the first Passover. It’s the graphic way in which the Lord chose to teach his people the most important truth they could ever know. A lamb’s blood shouldn’t be able to make such a big difference – life or death. It was like a snake on a pole. Why should looking at a snake on a pole be the difference between life and death when you’ve been fatally bitten by a poisonous snake? It was like washing in the Jordan River. Why should Naaman washing in the Jordan River be the difference between leprosy and a clean bill of health? Because attached to that snake on a pole and attached to Naaman washing in a river and attached to the blood of a sacrificial lamb was a promise from God. God’s promise made all the difference. Without the blood of the lamb, there was only death.

Fifteen hundred years of sacrificing the Passover lamb had now funneled down to one night. The lamb was not only on the table, he was at the table with his disciples, the Lamb who was going uncomplaining forth, the guilt of all men bearing. So soon now would he shed his blood, to pay for all sin, but not before establishing a new meal to replace the one which had now served its purpose. “This bread is my body, given for you. This wine is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Eat and drink. Do this in remembrance of me.” Whenever they had this meal, they were to remember him, how he had delivered them from eternal death. They were not to forget.

It's not yet the middle of the night, but this is no ordinary night. The new meal that Jesus started continues. There may well have been those who kept sacrificing animals. There may still be those who feel you have to bring some kind of sacrifice to God to make his anger go away. But the need for sacrifice stopped when the Lamb of God was sacrificed once and for all on the cross. Jesus' one-time sacrifice has never and need never be repeated, but his one-time sacrifice continues to be distributed in this meal we call the Lord's Supper.

Occasionally it happens that someone else jots down some words that you know are likely going to be better than anything you can come up with yourself. It would appear that Dr. Luther may have done that with a couple of sentences that show the connection between the Passover lamb and the Lord Jesus and our trust in him. *Here the true Paschal Lamb we see, Whom God so freely gave us; He died on the accursed tree-- So strong his love--to save us. See, his blood now marks our door; Faith points to it; death passes o'er, And Satan cannot harm us.*

The wages of sin remain the same. For your evil sin and mine, we have earned the wages of the destructive flood waters from the days of Noah. By our mean words, by our whimpering and whining, by our behavior which at times can only be described as godless, by the very nature of who we are we have earned the wages of burning sulfur raining down on us like Sodom and Gomorrah. The angel of death has been dispatched and he has his sights set on our houses and he has no reason to limit himself to taking only the firstborn. Without the blood of the lamb, there's only death.

Drawn directly from the Word of God, however, are these words that will easily be better than mine. His blood now marks our door. Jesus' blood marks your door. It does. A thousand times – it does. With the bread is his body, given for you. With the wine is his blood, shed for you. With your mouth you receive his once and for all sacrifice for sin. With the faith God has given, you believe it. Death passes over. Death passes over. Through this meal, through this message, a loving God declares, "You are forgiven. You are mine." Don't ever forget.