**“Prepared Food: Hezekiah”**

#

2 Chronicles 30:1-5, 10-13, 22b-27

 Midweek Lenten Series Maundy Thursday

Tonight we begin a three-day journey that follows the exodus of the Lord Jesus as He led His people from death into life on particular weekend. It fulfilled the nation of Israel’s exodus from Egypt to a Promised Land enacted through the Passover sacrifice and Feast of Unleavened Bread that **pointed to** the Lord’s Supper of **His own flesh and blood**.

**1**

Historically and tragically though, Judeans hadn’t always been faithful in their participation in this remembrance of deliverance like they’d been instructed to be. They’d been commanded to yearly and together enact this remembrance of life-saving blood-coverage and the consumption of the meat of the sacrifice, and Hezekiah (Judah’s king after his father Ahaz) determined that **this negligence had to stop and be reversed**.

For sixteen years, **Ahaz** led by self-indulgence and ignorance of the Lord, doing what pagans do, and God had driven that from the land under Joshua. Ahaz buried even the better kingdom in stupidity, so God let him fail in repeated military defeats. As recorded: “in the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord”. Even disasters wouldn’t return Ahaz to God as he’s reported to have entirely plunder the Lord’s Temple and board-up its doors.

But **Hezekiah** began his rule following his earlier father, David’s, path and “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord”. He began, immediately, to cleanse the Temple and restore the service of God’s House. He wanted to, immediately, observe the Passover with as would be its appropriate celebration.

**2**

So an invitation was sent to all or Judah and Israel by Hezekiah to come to Jerusalem and celebrate as was appropriate. Political obstacles delayed that gathering (or even the thought of it) and all twelve tribes would not be represented. Inviting both kingdoms, the ten tribes of the north had been separated from the south for far too many centuries. War was more their thing … even up through the administration of Ahaz. Moreover, they rejected Jerusalem and the Temple setting up their own altars so as not to have to travel to Jerusalem and gather with all. Hezekiah’s couriers got rejected by most in Israel: “through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, they **laughed at the invitation** and **mocked the message and messengers**”. **Some** humbled themselves and came, but the gathering would be far short of Hezekiah’s goal.

And this Passover would be **delayed**. The king and his princes took counsel on how to keep the feast a month later than normal since there weren’t enough priests consecrated to lead. And written in Number 9 that one ritually unclean or on a trip **could** celebrate the Passover in the **second** month rather than the **first**, this caveat had never been applied to an whole nation. This would be a national delay before God. And remember that Ahaz had closed-down the Temple, so even Judeans hadn’t been celebrating Passovers for a long time. But Hezekiah was **eager to hold the Feast**, so all preparations were **quickly made** and, with that, many (especially most in the northerners that came) were ritually unprepared and “unclean” as they were called for lack of that Preparation.

**3**

And yet God made a gracious wholesale exception to the cleansing preparations that weren’t done (this time not because of neglect, but haste and anxiousness and hunger for it). “The hand of God was on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the Word of the Lord.” Even those who came “unclean” God blessed in this remembrance Feast.

This, then, was a highly **unique** Passover in Judah’s history. The assembly **rejoiced greatly as in Solomon’s day**, and **the prayers of the Levites were heard not only in the Temple but (it says) “in the Lord’s habitation of Heaven”**. **The mighty acts of God’s salvation were once again put into central focus among a somewhat united nation**. And **Judeans with Israelite brothers and sisters worshiped together the God who’d delivered all of them from the land of Egypt to a Promised Land**.

**4**

King Hezekiah led toward a **great revival of faithfulness** in his reign. His son Manasseh, however, returned ruin to Judah all the way to the destruction of the Southern Kingdom and Jerusalem and the Temple. And that’s the cycle of earthly rule.

A Greater Son of Hezekiah would **need to do much the MORE**. And **ONE** **did!** Instead of sacrificing thousands of bulls and sheep, this Son of David and Hezekiah and offered **His own blood to pay for sin**. He had (after all) always been the Passover Lamb anyway, and He was the perfectly-prepared and fully-consecrated Priest presiding over the perfect worship of His Father earned and granted through His own bloodshed.

In the hours close to when Jesus would sacrifice Himself, He **commemorated that by passing-on to people His own the gift of Himself** **(what He called “the New Testament in His blood” / food for a believer’s Meal)**. He said to disciples: “I have earnestly desired to **eat this Passover with you before I suffer**”. The Passover Meal (with the eating of the Sacrificial flesh and the Cup of Blessing) had always been the serving of Him that pointed to the night He was in and that next day). “Do **THIS as oft as ye** … in remembrance of Me”.

And Jesus invites the entire Kingdom. He desires that all eat and drink of Him as He gives that communion with Him. “To all who receive Him / who believe in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, so multitudes, from every nation, with one heart cleansed by the Holy Spirit of God (so prepared for the Feast by His grace), gather to eat and drink. For us, that Meal is often and regular. And we “proclaim, in it, His death until He comes”.

**5**

Tonight, God’s Son and Hezekiah’s has **prepared the Passover celebration FOR US**.

And this is, still, only a foretaste of the “Feast to Come” … yet a real “**FORETASTE**”. And, while it may seem as if Jesus is in no hurry for His final return, He is “eager” to serve us in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the meantime, though, His eagerness is to serve in **this Sacramental Meal**.

Whether any have been regular at the Holy Table Sacrament (in this Feast) or distant as were the Judeans for way too long, we have it to rejoice-in and receive from Jesus’ sacrifice of these next remembered hours of this night and tomorrow. With the whole Church all around the world and of a gift of (in this) being of “one heart”, we receive together the blessings of God in Christ’s willing sacrifice. Amen.