

Series: THE ANSWER NO ONE EXPECTED - April 17, 2011

THE LAST PASSOVER

Luke 22:1-38, Exodus 12

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1. Most of us can trace back through our lives to **defining moments** that changed the direction of our lives—sometimes for bad—but, also, sometimes for **good**. It's like life is a series of intersections. Sometimes we just blow through them—too fast to notice; sometimes there's a stop sign—and it's **clearly** left or right. But sometimes, it's there's a fork in the road—and, as you're moving—you have to choose.

-I faced an intersection when I was in my second year of university. It was a **she**. She was a really nice girl, we got along great—I thought I was in love, **but...** I prayed, I thought, and there was no clear **yes** or **no**—just a hunch. The easier decision was—just keep going. I made the **harder** decision; I broke up with her. That single decision, believe it or not, took life in a **totally** different direction—which led to traveling in a band for a year, which led to meeting and marrying Lori, which led to contacts in Canada which would eventually bring me right here where I am now. I've thought, "What if I had turned left, not right?" **Can anyone relate to that?**

-Most of us can also point to a **bad** decision; and then we come to a place of regret and think, "If I had **only...!**" And sometimes, life has a weird way of circling back to the same place—and we have this **déjà vu** feeling inside, "Oh my **word**, I've been here before! Now. **Will I make a better choice this time...** or will I just take another ride on the merry-go-round?"

-In the last week of Jesus' life, He brings his entire nation—and all of humankind, really--back to the place where they started. He asks two questions everyone **thinks** they know the answers to; **Do you want to live? Do you want to be free?**

2. There is no doubt that Jesus knew how profound his last week would be—He talked about it **long** before it happened. He had told his disciples what was coming—but I don't think they got it. I wouldn't have either. It was just too far out there to grasp.

-What was strange about this week was that it seemed to move from what seems to be the highest point of acceptance and victory of Jesus' life—Palm Sunday—to this incredibly sad and dismal ending on Friday; Passover.

-What you realize, as you look more deeply into what happened in that week, is that it represented two major turning points in the history of the Jewish people. Turning points where God intervened, opportunities were given and choices were made. And Jesus revisits these two historic occasions—and changes them forever. How many of you would like to take a look at these occasions and see what Jesus was up to? How many would like me to stop here? Historically, Passover comes first—so let's start there.

- a. Months ago, we talked about how Abraham's descendants ended up in Egypt. Joseph, Abe's great-grandson, was sold as a slave by his brothers—and ended

up as Prime Minister. Well, he brought his entire family there to preserve them from a famine that would've killed them all.

-Four hundred years later—the Egyptians, afraid of their dramatic growth in numbers—make the Israelites their slaves. But God—who promised He would make them into a nation—saw their oppression—and heard their cries for help. And He called a man—Moses, a shepherd—to confront the superpower of that day, and rescue them from a situation that was, humanly speaking, impossible.

-When you think about it, the cries surrounding Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday were the same. I mean, the people had their own land, but they were the slaves of **another** superpower—Rome. They had been trampled, taxed, humiliated and crucified into poverty and submission. And they **hated** it. So the passage in Matthew that describes Jesus' entry makes complete sense:

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" (Matthew 21:8-10 NIV)

-The word, **hosanna**, literally means, **Save! Save us, Son of David!** They had had enough. You can only **imagine** how this scene must've put the Romans and those who collaborated with them on high alert. "**Another** Messiah! More chaos, more crosses, more death!"

- b. Moses confronts Pharaoh; "My God has told me to tell you, **Let My people go!**" It doesn't go well—Pharaoh doesn't seem all that excited about releasing his entire workforce of city-builders. Well, the entire land gets pounded by one plague after another—all judgments on the gods they worshipped. The water turns to blood. Then there are frogs. **No!** Gnats—everyone itching, scratching their heads. **No!** Flies. **No!** Mad cow disease—or whatever. **No!** Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness—**No, No, No, No!!**

-Pharaoh's heart is so hardened—he won't even listen to his officials who are saying, "**Enough, already! Let them go!**" There's only one more judgment that can get his attention. It's a judgment on the firstborn of **every** family—everything in Egypt, really. You have to understand that in families of that day, the **firstborn** was **the big deal!** Pharaoh's **only** equal in Egypt was his firstborn son--the firstborn represented the entire future of a family.

- c. God showed his plan to Moses. It was very simple. In the dark of night, the angel of death would pass through Egypt and kill every firstborn—right down to the livestock. The **only** protection for the Israelites—was **blood.**

-Each family was to take a lamb, kill it, and smear it's blood on the doorposts of their house. There was to be a meal, eaten at twilight. It consisted of bread

without yeast, bitter herbs, roasted lamb. This meal would represent the hurry of getting ejected out of Egypt; the bitter herbs would represent the suffering and oppression they experienced; the lamb would represent the cost of being spared from death—and delivered from slavery. The term **Passover** had huge significance.

For the Lord will pass through the land to strike down the Egyptians. But when he sees the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe, the Lord will *pass over* your home. He will not permit his death angel to enter your house and strike you down.
(Exodus 12:23-24 NLT)

-Every year as the Jewish people explained this celebration to their children—it would be clear, as they killed the lamb, that it was the blood of an innocent animal that spared their lives.

- d. The final price tag on Pharaoh's home and nation was a horrendous one. I've done stupid things that have deeply affected people I love. I can't even **imagine** what it would feel like to know that your pride and arrogance had cost you your own son—and the firstborn of all your friends and relatives. From the bedside of his dead son, Pharaoh called for Moses—and told him to tell all of his people and their livestock and possessions and **get out of Egypt**. And that Exodus from slavery in Egypt was the **extraordinary** founding of the nation of Israel. God stepped in—**He** became their God; **they** became His people.

-If you read through the Old Testament—you find this event recalled again and again. **This** is the moment God claimed you! **This** is where you came from! Don't ever, **ever** forget your history. Passover, was **THE** signature celebration for the Jewish people.

- e. And almost 1500 years later, it was the **Passover** meal that Jesus chose to share as His last supper with his disciples. And it was clear what was going on. Think about it. When Jesus showed up to be baptized, John the Baptist said, **This is Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!** In fact, it was at that meal that Jesus made it clear that, from this point on--it was going to be a **new** covenant--a **whole** new deal. Not just for the Jewish people—but for the world. Does anyone think that it was by sheer chance that Jesus died the next day—on **Passover**?

3. There's a **second** historical occasion that happens this week—one that I'm embarrassed to say I have only **recently** noticed. Let me set it up for you. Israel's history from the moment they were released from slavery in Egypt—until David comes along—is quite spotty.

-They hadn't been out of Egypt for even 3 months when they rebelled against Moses, whined, complained, and started saying things like, "**We were better off in Egypt as slaves! God released us—only to bring us out here into the desert to die of thirst!**" What's interesting is that it's almost like they were willing to go **back** to slavery because of their **cravings!** It happens over and over. **We want food! We**

want water! We want meat! At times, Moses was **absolutely** exasperated with them.

-This pattern of rebellion—interspersed with brief periods of obedience—continues from the desert—right into the land God gave them. It seems like having David as king put them on a better track. And it **really** looked like his leadership was a set up for the fulfillment of all the promises God had made. David wanted to cap it off by building a temple to honour God. Nathan, the prophet, said—**No!** Then this:

For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong. He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will secure his royal throne forever. (2 Samuel 7:12-13 NLT)

-It appeared to everyone who heard this that God was referring to Solomon. And in the early stages of Solomon's reign, that's exactly what seems to be happening. God spoke to Solomon. Promised him unusual wisdom and discernment; promised him peace and wealth and fame. Another of David's sons, Adonijah, tried to beat him to the throne—but David declared **Solomon** to be king. See if anything about the record of that sounds vaguely familiar:

So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the king's bodyguard took Solomon down to Gihon Spring, with *Solomon riding on King David's own mule*. There Zadok the priest took the flask of olive oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon with the oil. Then they sounded the ram's horn and all the people shouted, "Long live King Solomon!" *And all the people followed Solomon into Jerusalem, playing flutes and shouting for joy*. The celebration was so joyous and noisy that the earth shook with the sound. (1 Kings 1:38-40 NLT)

- a. Think about it; the Son of David—riding into Jerusalem on a beast of burden—not a military steed—in the middle of a huge ground-shaking celebration. Hope was running sky high; Solomon's rule would be famous throughout the world. He would build a temple—and his kingdom and fame would just keep expanding!

-Solomon was an **incredible** leader—world renowned, really. But Solomon came to a fork in the road: Would God be the focus of his attention and worship? Would he **depend** on God for protection and help? Or would he use his God-given wealth and brilliance to just do what all the **other** kings did—only **better!** You can **tell** which way he turned.

-The record of Solomon's life tells us that he became **just like Pharaoh** with multiple wives—700, to be exact, one of them being Pharaoh's daughter. He bought horses and chariots from Egypt—and became an arms dealer. He began worshipping multiple gods. His **final** act was his worst. He **became** the oppressor Pharaoh had been and enslaved foreigners to build his palaces and fortresses—and even the temple for God. And from Solomon on, there is this

downward spiral of the nation into idolatry—and back into oppression and captivity.

- b. It's fascinating, isn't it? That someone who **was** brilliant and wise and godly—someone who **knew** the that God had brought them out of slavery—who **knew** how God hated oppression of anyone--would **become** the slave driver, the oppressor that caused people to call out to God for deliverance?
4. Could Jesus, upon his entrance into Jerusalem—900 years later--have become a big, important king—wealthy beyond belief—forcing all the nations of the world, even Rome, to comply with his wishes? He could've done this by just **thinking** about it! He had legions of angels at his command.

-In fact, it's what his followers expected—and what Satan tempted him to do in the wilderness! But Jesus was a **very** different kind of king.

“Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”
(Matthew 21:5 NIV)

-When Jesus was addressed as David's Son—you can just imagine how all the religious leaders felt about **that!**

But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant. “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”
(Matthew 21:15-16 NIV)

- a. Now. Do you have a sense of the immensity of what was going on? The first son of David—as brilliant as he was—blew it—and **became** the slave driver—ultimately sending his people back into oppression. And Solomon just handled power the way our world system does. Jesus shows a different way. He **lays aside** his power—and **becomes** a servant.

-He's **THE** Son of David—and this time it will go according to God's plan—not human plans. Instead of accepting everyone's praise and the world's gold—he will suffer the ultimate in humiliation—and end up nailed naked to a Roman stake. And as his blood slowly drips into the dirt, the last of his possessions will be gambled away.

- b. Jesus' disciples had all seen Him ride into Jerusalem as the Son of David—to lead God's people, take back the temple, make Israel famous again. I'm sure as the disciples watched Jesus' popularity dwindling through the week, they were thinking, “Jesus—if you're going to make this whole thing work, you'd better do something—cause you're losing followers—**fast!**”

-And **that's** when Jesus chooses to share the Passover Meal. As they're arguing about who's the greatest—**who de man!**—Jesus strips down and **washes feet!** **What kind of king does that!** As the meal progresses, they watch in absolute astonishment as Jesus deliberately **changes** the most sacred ritual in the history of the Jewish people—the **Passover Meal!** The bread without leaven (a symbol of sin) becomes **His** body! The wine becomes **his** blood, shed for sin! And Jesus becomes the lamb—who will die to spare people from death—and set them free.

-Who has the authority to change something that God instituted and told His people to observe forever? Well, if **God** commanded it—then only **God** can change it! And the day before He gave his life, He did.

- c. Later that evening, Jesus would be arrested—even though He was innocent—and, if anything, **understating** the truth of Who He really was. Pilate, the Roman governor **knew** Jesus was innocent, but chickened out, washed his hands of Him—and let Him be both beaten and crucified.

-If you'll remember the plagues in Egypt, the last one before Passover—was darkness. I can't help but think that the darkness that apparently enveloped Jerusalem before Jesus, the Lamb of God, God's firstborn died, was significant. How about you? As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the people called to Him, **Save us, Son of David!** At the cross, the religious professionals—along with the others mocking Jesus said, "If you're Israel's **Deliverer** why don't you save **yourself?**"

-Of course, the point is that if He really was going to save them—and save us—from slavery and death—He **couldn't** save Himself. Jesus, one and only Son, **God's** firstborn over all creation—would not be spared this time. He would die, his blood smeared on the wooden beams of a cross—so that **I** could be spared; so **you** could be spared—so **every single person on this planet** could be spared—and **finally** be **free!**

5. Can I tell you where **I** think we're at? I think we live in a world that understands the beauty of life—and the ugliness of death. There is a reason why the sight of blood makes us shudder and faint—and want to run away or throw up. There is something **horrible—unthinkable--**about someone lying in a pool of their own blood, or a scene where someone's blood is spattered on the walls and ceiling.

-And there's a reason why the birth of a baby is a miracle; why, when babies smile and giggle—it's like Heaven opens and smiles. There's a reason why we **love** to play with puppies and kittens; why the first leaves and flowers in the Spring make us glad we're alive. There's something **powerful** about a scene of pristine beauty—untouched by mining and lumbering; why the water in a lake—still pure enough to drink is astounding.

-Life is **always** good; death is **always** sad and wrong. We understand the beauty of life—and to think that Jesus gave **His** life as God's Firstborn to spare **our** lives—and the lives of **our** firstborn—is awesome! Breathtaking. Even if you find that

incredible—virtually **impossible** to believe—you **want** to believe that the Creator, the most powerful Being in the universe is **that** good and loving and **kind!**

-And I think we understand the power and the beauty of freedom. The thought that there are people in our world who would sell—or kidnap children for a life of prostitution or oppression is **unthinkable!** Does that make **anyone** furious besides me? Freedom is one of our most precious gifts in Canada. The thought of being controlled by the people who give us our food and our paycheck and our housing—where we **have no choice** is unthinkable. Ugly.

-What is **unclear** to us, sometimes, is the **source** of freedom and life—and the **source** of slavery and death. When the Passover originally took place—and the lives of the Israelites were spared—and they were launched into freedom—the giddiness of that experience is written all over the records. Miriam, Moses' sister—in her 80s—took her tambourine, wrote a brand new song—and **danced!**

-Then these **same** people are angry at Moses and God within weeks, saying stupid things like, “Gee, if only we'd never left Egypt!” What were they talking about? **Fish, melons, garlic and onions, for crying out loud!** God freed them from slavery—but the **slavery never got out of them!**

- a. And what you see in their lives—and **ours**, by the way--is this ongoing ambivalence, I want to be free—but I **don't want God telling me what to do! I want to do what I want to do!** And that leads....? Well, back to slavery and death. I think that's what Jesus was getting at in the scene where, as he's riding the donkey into Jerusalem—the city comes into view:

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.” IT'S TOO LATE!
(Luke 19:41-42 NIV)

-This was their defining moment—and they **missed** it. Did they value life—and **want** life? Of **course** they did—every bit as much as we do! Did they value freedom—and **want** freedom? So bad they could **taste** it! But they didn't know how to find it—even though He was riding through their city on a donkey!

- b. Jesus' offer of life and peace and freedom to this world comes **mainly** through the people who have received it. People like you and me. Sometimes we struggle to find freedom—and keep it, don't we? Jesus put it like this:

“...Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:34-36 NIV)

-From what Jesus is saying here, you can be the head of the most powerful nation in the world--and be a slave. You can be a free spirit, independently wealthy--a bungee-jumping, sky-diving, wilderness navigating, ocean-sailing freedom freak—and be a slave to this insatiable itch inside you to **be your own**

person and not have God bug you about the self-absorption of your life.

You can be a card-carrying member of Freedom 55—and be a **slave**. You can be the warden of a prison—and be imprisoned!

- c. We watched an interesting phenomena here on our property this past week. You know we have Canada Geese here, right? Well, one Mother Goose made a nest—**right outside the front door**. Which, theoretically, is not a problem. But, not only was it unsafe for their young—these are **attack** geese! See, they **know** they're **Canada** geese--the national bird and have to protect that status. The male, in particular, was chasing and hissing at people who came here for math classes and Bible studies.

-So, unfortunately—we had to disrupt the nest. What was interesting is that the geese immediately started rebuilding the nest! When Anne and Sandra flapped their coats and hissed at the geese to put an old broken **microwave** where the nest was, the geese started protecting the **microwave!**

-Sometimes animals **just don't know when to LEAVE!** And sometimes we don't either.

- d. **Passover**, friends, is about **leaving slavery**. Think about what would've happened if on the first Passover, God had spared the firstborn of the Israelites—but left them in slavery. The **point** of the whole thing was **getting his people out of slavery** so that they could become **His** people. His community.

-And this **last** Passover—initiated by Jesus—is about saving us from death and giving us life—but it's **also** about Jesus coming to **rescue** us, **deliver** us—and **set us free** as a brand new community—His people—in this world. And the question I'd like to ask, as we close, is what do **you** need to leave behind to be free; to really experience the resurrection power of Jesus? See, if our calling as this New Community of God--followers of Jesus--is to be free, to be filled with peace and life—then it would be important if we live what we're hoping others will find, don't you think? Do you mind if I get into the messy stuff?

*It could be that, to be free—to build a solid, loving relational world—you need to leave behind the way you think about others, the words you use that cut and wound—the way you talk to your spouse, or your parents or your family members.

*It could be that you have cravings and addictions and lusts that are like chains—with locks and bars—and the stuff you want most—is threatening to destroy you—and what you really want most for your life. And you need to be free.

*It could be that you've been hurt deeply—and under the surface of your life is this raging infection of hatred and bitterness and unforgiveness—and you are **chained** to the person who hurt you most—and you **long** to be free!

*It could be that you're locked into relational patterns—that leave you feeling guilty, ashamed, empty and broken—but your life is like this broken record that just keeps playing the same thing over and over and over.

*It could be that you are stuck in patterns of deception—actually, **lying**—and your life is a lie. And every lie you tell creates another bar for your prison. Do you want to be free?

*It could be that you are chained to some form of technology—a cellphone, the internet, an I-phone, video games, TV—and you waste hour after hour after hour—chasing stuff that leaves you bored and empty.

*It could be that your need for your friends, for their attention, their approval, their presence—is your Master. And your desire to be popular with them and not lose them **drives** pretty much all you do?

*Food can be a slavedriver. Buying it. Eating it—or **not** eating it, obsessing over the kind, the nutritious value of it, obsessing over reading about it and worrying about it.

*It could be sports, a hobby, your job, your appearance, your temper, your money, your stuff...

-The bottom line question is this: **What do I need to die to so I can LIVE!**

Q & A

6. Let me tell you what we're going to do. We're not going to have a Good Friday service as such, but we are going to open up the auditorium from 12 – 3 on Good Friday. The Prayer Room will be available if you want someone to pray with you. . There will be bread and wine at the front—if you want to take communion. But at the center will be the cross. If you'd like to drive a stake—bring a physical representation of something you'd like to leave behind—and leave it at the cross. I will guarantee you this. By Easter—it will be gone! Somewhere. Because **Jesus** has set us free...to be **free!**