

THE SACRIFICE OF A KING

Ps. 92: 2, 6

Ps. 16: 3 - 5

Hymn 21: 1 - 3

Hymn 21: 4 - 6

Hymn 21: 7

Scripture reading: John 18:28 - 19:37

Text: John 19:19

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The word “Passover” means to pass over, or to pass by. The Passover feast is the feast of passing by - the passing by of God’s judgment.

The Lord said to Moses:

“...when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” - Ex.12:13

It is the Passover of God’s judgement, the passing by of His judgment, that we celebrate. When He sees the blood of the Lamb, His judgement passes us by.

The same night when God judged Egypt at midnight was also the night of Israel’s deliverance. And so when the next generation would ask their parents: what does this feast mean?, they had to answer their children:

“It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households” - Ex.12:27.

It was the blood of a lamb without blemish that made His judgment to pass by, or to pass over.

In our text this Lamb is called Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. And so I will preach God’s Word to you with the theme: **The Passover Lamb and His kingdom**

As we look at this gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ we will see...

- i. That He was a Lamb without blemish
- ii. That He fulfilled all the prophecies
- iii. That His kingdom is not of this world

In the first place we note that...

He was a Lamb without blemish

Israel had to slay the Passover lamb for nearly a thousand five hundred years. Every year they were reminded how God's judgement has passed them by and of their deliverance that night out of Egypt.

At the same time the Passover feast was a shadow of the final deliverance from God's judgment, when the final sacrifice for our sins would be made.

In our text that moment has finally come. It is the last and final Passover feast in Jerusalem.

The previous evening Jesus and His disciples have already eaten the Passover lamb, but the previous evening belonged to the same day - as the Jews reckon an evening to belong to the next day. And so the day that the disciples ate the Passover lamb was the same day Jesus was crucified.

Now, in our text we see the true and only Passover Lamb on the cross, but with the heading:

“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”

It is written in Hebrew so that the covenant people may read it for themselves.

It is also written in Greek, the international language of the day, so that every stranger who looks to the cross may read it.

And it is written in Latin, the language of the Roman empire, so that the authorities and the soldiers may know the reason for His crucifixion.

This title, King of the Jews, brought the death penalty on Him.

The Jewish council, who consisted of the chief priests, the scribes and the elders (Mt.26:3), decided that He has to die. They couldn't find any lawful reason for their desire to kill Him, and they had quite a struggle with this. We read:

“...the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none...” - Mt.26:59f.

Finally, the High priest stood up and said to Jesus:

“I put you under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!”

And when Jesus confirmed that He is indeed the Christ, the Son of God, the whole council said: He spoke blasphemy, He deserves to die! (Mt.26:63 - 66).

But now, in front of Pontius Pilate, they try to pass sentence on Him on other grounds, saying:

“We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar,

saying that He Himself is Christ, a King” - Luke 23:2

They knew that Pilate is not much interested in their religious law, that he will not condemn Jesus for supposed blasphemy, and so they want to bring Pilate under the impression that Jesus is a political trouble maker, a political danger.

And so they start to play a game of influencing Pilate to get a death sentence out of Him, by hook or by crook.

But even this foul play with all its false accusations was at first unsuccessful. Pontius Pilate knew that the Jews handed Jesus over to him *because of envy* - Mt. 27:18.

Pilate knew that their accusations were all false, and three times he declares that he find no guild in this Man.

In this unjust trail, loaded with false accusations and false pretensions, we read repeatedly that Jesus kept silent, so much so that the governor marvelled greatly because of this.

No accusation could stand against Him, but also: He did not even try to defend Himself!

As the prophet said:

“...He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent” (Isaiah 53:7).

As a lamb - a lamb without blemish - but also as a lamb in His submission to do the will of His Father.

Even the heathen judge, Pilate, has to declare the innocence of Jesus three times:

“I find no fault in Him at all” - John 18:38

And again he says:

“Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him” - 19:4.

“You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him” - 19:6.

He finds no fault in Him at all, but he scourges Him (19:1) and crucify Him (19:16).

He asked Jesus:

“Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?”

He acknowledges that this power is given to him; he has the power to release Jesus if he wants to. But his own political position weighs heavier to him, than upholding justice.

And so this whole trial portrays on the one hand the horrible injustice of man, and on the other hand the innocence of this Man, Jesus - One who did not have to die for His own sins.

He was the Lamb without blemish.

In this tragic history of the Passover, with all its wrong and injustice done to our Lord Jesus Christ, we see however the man Jesus *not* a helpless victim of circumstances, nor as the victim of blind fate. On the contrary, we see in this trial how the eternal counsel of God finds its fulfilment, as it was proclaimed by all the prophets.

In the first place our text is given in a context where we are repeatedly reminded of the *timeframe* in which the crucifixion takes place.

There was a build up towards this moment described in the previous chapters. The whole gospel of John is written in such a way that it is structured around this Passover feast. We read in chapter 2:13:

“Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand...”

And again in chapter 6:4:

“Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near”.

Again in chapter 11:55:

“And the Passover of the Jews was near...”

And so the apostle John has structured the ministry of Jesus, from the start to the end, as a ministry from one Passover to the next Passover, until it reaches its climax with the final and real Passover: the everlasting passing over of God’s judgment when His own Son took our curse upon Him.

And so we are compelled to understand the whole description of Christ’s trial and everything that He does on this day, and all that is done to Him on this day, as the final fulfilment of Passover. We read a description of the final and real Passover.

There are much more than just the few examples mentioned so far. If we would read the previous chapters carefully, everything is building up and preparing for the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb.

When Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anoints Jesus’ feet with very costly oil, John tells us that this was done six days before Passover, and that it was done for the day of His burial! - John 12:1 - 7. And so also the next chapter, chapter 13, starts with a reminder that the feast of the Passover was drawing near, and that Jesus knew that His hour has come.

And so we can continue up to our present text which is now the very description of this Passover.

We read in chapter 18:28 that the council did not enter into the palace of the Roman governor, because they did not want to defile themselves! They wanted to stay clean so that they may eat that day of the Passover lamb! It was a holy Sabbath according to the law of Moses. And it happened that the following day, the seventh day, was also a Sabbath, so that they were entering a double Sabbath: Friday and Saturday. The apostle tells us that *that* Sabbath was *a huge Sabbath* (as the Greek text may also be translated in chapter 19:31).

Now, as Pilate goes out to the Jews and sits down in the judgment seat to give His final judgement on Jesus, the apostle adds these words:

“Now it was the preparation day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And He said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’” - 19:14

Do you see how the apostle connects the very hour of Jesus' condemnation to the preparation of the Passover lamb? And how he also connects the Passover Lamb, whom they are preparing for slaughter, with the King of the Jews? He says it was the Preparation day for the Passover, that is to say: the day when the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed, and then he immediately adds the words of Pilate: Behold your King! Then follows the crucifixion with these words again written on the cross: The King of the Jews.

The King of the Jews is being prepared as the Passover Lamb!

And so two things are combined in this gospel: the *suffering* of the Christ and His *glory* that was to follow. It seems to be two different kinds of prophecies that are now flowing together with His crucifixion: The suffering Servant, and the royal Son of David.

We look at that in the second place...

The fulfilment of all the prophecies

Why did Pilate attach this heading to the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"?

It is obvious that he wanted to mock the Jews. What a joke! Do you see this wretched man on the cross? Why, He is the king of the Jews! What a wretched nation with such a king!

Pilate is not only an unjust judge, he is also a scoffer. Yet, God uses both the unjust sentence as well as the scoffing of this man, to bring *His* counsel to fulfilment.

Although Pilate means to mock with these words, the Lord uses him in this respect as a prophet. There in public, in the well known languages of the day so that

everyone may read it, the heading is printed above Jesus' head: The King of the Jews.

It is God who made Pilate to write these words. When the Jews complain about this and ask Pilate to change the wording, Pilate refuses. Suddenly he is no more afraid of the Jews or concerned to please them. No, these words may not be changed. Jesus is the King of the Jews. What is written is written, he says.

And this was indeed written! Not only written by Pilate on the cross, but by all the prophets of God on the pages of holy Scripture. The evil counsel of the Jewish leaders, and of Pilate, found its place in the eternal counsel of God. **God** determined it to happen - Acts.4:28.

God is in control. Everything happens just as the prophets have spoken.

But now we have two contrasts here: A Lamb slaughtered, and the announcement of His Kingship.

This is not by accident. Just as the previous chapters were laying the stage for the final sacrifice, the same chapters were also connecting this sacrifice to His victory and glory.

When Jesus enters Jerusalem for this final Passover, the crowd is shouting:

“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! The King of Israel!” - 12:13.

And John underlines this with a quotation from the Old Testament:

“...Behold, your King is coming...” - John 12: 15.

And then, when Jesus starts to instruct the people who came for the Passover, He speaks to them about His *crucifixion* and says:

“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified” - 12: 23

Jesus joins His crucifixion and His glorification together.

And so it should not surprise us to read this heading on the cross: **The King of the Jews.**

But someone may ask: Where is the glory? Should we not rather understand this heading “The King of the Jews” to be the scoffing of Pilate, just as the scoffing of the soldiers when they hit Jesus through the face saying:

“Hail, King of the Jews!”?

Is it honour, or is it mocking?

It was indeed intended by His enemies as mocking, but according to Psalm 2 we know that it was God laughing in heaven, mocking with Pilate and holding the council of the Jews in derision. When they thought that they could cast off the cords of this King, **God** spoke to them in His wrath, according to Psalm 2, saying:

“...I have set my King on my holy hill in Zion...”

Even in His deepest humiliation this prophecy is published above His head for everyone to read that **He** is the promised King, the King of the Jews, the One who will reign forever on the throne of David.

In the passage that we read it is repeated ten times: Jesus, the King of the Jews! And to show us that this is not only the mocking of ignorant heathens, the apostle

says five times in this passage that these things were done so that the Scripture should be fulfilled.

He gives us several examples, even of small things that happen at His crucifixion, to show us how the Scripture was fulfilled even to the minutest detail.

The soldiers divided His clothes and then casted lots for His tunic, so that the Scripture could be fulfilled as is written in Ps.22:18:

“They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots”.

Jesus called out on the cross: “I thirst!” and they gave Him vinegar to drink, so that the Scripture could be fulfilled as is written in Ps.69:21:

“...for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink”.

The soldiers did not break His bones as they did with the others, but they pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And this was done that the Scripture should be fulfilled as it is written of this Passover Lamb in Ex.12:46:

“...nor shall you brake one of its bones”.

And also to fulfil the Scripture as it is written in Zechariah 12:10:

“...they will look on Me whom they pierced...”.

Yes, not one of all the prophecies remained unfulfilled. Even the smallest detail happened exactly as it was prophesied. And this applies also to the heading on the cross: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. This man of Nazareth, with the name “Jahve saves”, **He** is the Messiah, the King of Israel.

But what is His kingdom like? We note that in the third place, that...

His kingdom is not of this world

Jesus testifies before Pilate of His kingdom and He says:

“My kingdom is not of this world” (18:36).

The Jews have indeed expected the coming of the Messiah, but many of them longed for a king who would grant them political freedom. They have already departed so far from God’s word, that they did not even know anymore that they had much more need of the redemption from their sins and from the wrath of God, and that they had much more need for the “pass over” of God’s judgment.

Most of them were not much interested in the suffering Servant of the LORD. They rather longed for a mighty king who would throw the Romans out and who would expand the boundaries of Israel far and wide.

Did the prophets not speak of this Messiah, a King on the throne of David, who would inherit the ends of the earth as His possession - Ps.2:8?

But this Man on the cross is an embarrassment to them. It is an embarrassment for them to read this heading on the cross: The King of the Jews. He is not their king!

To drive Pilate into a corner, they said to him:

“We have no king, but Caesar!” (19:15).

In saying this they denied God as their King, and chose a heathen ruler as their king.

But it is not only *they* who deny Jesus as their King. This King hanging on the cross is a stumbling block to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek - a stumbling

block to covenant children who became earthly minded. This King and His kingdom is foolishness to the humanist with his pride and his science and his logic.

His kingdom is indeed strange to this world. Yes, His kingdom is not of this world.

The apostle Paul reminds Timothy of this trial where Jesus testified to Pilate:

“My kingdom is not of this world” (18:36).

Paul reminds Timothy of this in a context where he exhorts him to flee from the love of money, and exhorts him to fight the good fight of faith, and he says to him:

“I urge you...before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate...” - 1 Tim.6: 13.

Remember, Timothy, that our kingdom is not of this world. Don't seek a kingdom for yourself in this world, but lay hold on eternal life, seek to enter the kingdom of *this* King.

His kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness. “Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist”. Truth and righteousness. It shall be a kingdom without sin or pollution, an undefiled glory where God will be with us as our God, the promised land where the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The promised land where the cow and the bear shall graze and their young ones shall lie down together, where the lion shall eat straw like an ox. Paradise shall be restored, with everlasting peace.

But how will this kingdom be established? It will be established only by reconciling us to our God. This kingdom that was promised was founded on the day of the Passover. And so the Passover Lamb and the King of the Jews is united in this gospel.

We receive this kingdom only because our sins are paid for. *This* is the peace: that we are reconciled to our God.

By the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ the eternal wrath of God has passed us over. It was the final and everlasting Passover of God's judgment, full deliverance from the house of bondage for everyone who believes this gospel.

Everyone who believes this gospel, trusting on Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for our sins, shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Amen.