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Presentation Transcript
Anybody Home? – Unleavened Bread
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Good afternoon. This is Bill Jacobs with LifeResource Ministries.

As best we can tell, at the stroke of 3 pm on June 19th in 31 AD, Jesus Christ died. Read with me in Matthew. In Matthew 27:45, it says:

Matthew 27:45-46 – *From the sixth hour – which is noon – until the ninth hour – that would be 3 – darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”* And then, if we drop down to verse 50, it says:

V-50-53 – *And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit. At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. And they came out of the tombs. After Jesus’ resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.*

So some strange and mysterious things took place that afternoon. It was dark for three hours in the middle of the day. There was an earthquake so strong that rocks split. People came out of the grave and the veil in the temple of God was torn in two. Why? Why would God destroy something in His own temple?

Well, the answer to that question has a lot to do with the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. And it has a lot to do with each of us. There’s important meaning there for everybody here today, no matter your age, gender, race or culture. And what is that?

Well, let’s start in an unlikely place to unravel this mystery with a man named Manoah. He’s mentioned in Judges 13.

Judges 13:2 – *A man named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless, we're told. Now back in those days, it was a much bigger thing than it is in our culture. Everybody wanted kids. One day – in the story – an angel appeared to Manoah's wife and said, "You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son."*

Well, that was really good news. And there were special instructions that came along with it. The angel told her not to drink any alcohol or eat any unclean foods and never cut his hair. He was to be a Nazarite – someone set aside for a special calling from God. The angel tells her that his calling was to begin the deliverance of Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

So the woman went to her husband and told him, "A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel – very awesome. I didn't ask him where he came from and he didn't tell me his name." Then she told her husband what the angel said. And Manoah, like the rest of us, had lots of questions. So he prayed that God would send the stranger back to give more details about how they should raise up their son for his special calling. So, in answer to his prayer, in the story, God sends the angel back. And he first came to Manoah's wife again, and when she saw the man, she rushed to get Manoah. And she said, "He's here – the man of God who appeared to me the other day!" So Manoah asked this man, "What do you want to do with this special child?" Then the angel, pretty much, just reiterated what he'd already told Manoah's wife about being a Nazarite, and saving Israel from the Philistines, and all that. And Manoah, deeply appreciative, I think, said to the angel, "We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you." The angel declined the food, but told Manoah, "If you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD." And then, in the account, we're told this:

V-16 – *Manoah did not realize that it was an angel of the LORD.*

Now, his wife suspected. We know that. But Manoah, even after talking to him, just didn't get it. So, you can get the feeling with Manoah that the lights were on, but nobody was home. Manoah also asked this man his name. And he said, "Why would you ask me my name? It's beyond your ability to understand it." We don't know what Manoah did that one, but it clearly didn't connect. But he did sacrifice the goat. And while he was doing that, as the flames blazed up from the goat sacrifice, the angel, we are told, ascended in the flame. And it was only after that did Manoah realize that he had been talking to someone who wasn't human. At this point, Manoah exclaims, "We're doomed to die! We've see God!" But his wife, who seemed to be a bit quicker on the draw than her husband – maybe this is why the angel came to her first – reasoned:

V-23-24 – *"If the LORD meant to kill us, he would not have accepted the burnt offering and the grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things, nor told us all this."* Then the account tells us: *The woman give birth to a boy named Samson. And he grew and the LORD blessed them.*

So rather a strange scene. What's the point? Why do you think that's in the Bible? Well, I think, beside some background on Samson – and it might mean that there was a lot about God that's hard for us. I mean, that's clear in the story. When it comes to God, all of us, at times, act like Manoah – like the lights are on, but nobody's home. We just don't get it. God and a large part of His creation are out of reach for us right now. We have a hard time understanding those things. God Himself is a mystery to us. And this is because he shrouds Himself in mystery.

If you'll think about it, for the first four thousand years of human existence, people didn't even know about God the Father. He wasn't known in ages past. Look with me in John 1.

John 1:1 – *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him, all things were made. Without Him, nothing was made that has been made.*

That God that created Adam and Eve – they were talking to – that was the one that later became Jesus Christ. The Father is not known in this picture yet. Further, we're told in verse 10:

V-10 – *He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. In fact, His own people killed Him. Yet all who receive Him, to those who believe in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God.*

So, when the One who created human beings came in the flesh, they didn't recognize who He was. Now, you must remember, we're answering the question, "Why would God tear the veil in the temple after Christ died?" That's the story we're telling today. Why would He destroy something in His own temple? The temple has three parts – the outer court, the holy place where the priests went, and the holy of holies, where only the high priest could enter, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement. And the veil was a large curtain that separated the holy place from the holy of holies, where nobody was allowed to go. Why the division between the two with the veil?

Well, if you read about the veil in the tabernacle – which, I'm sure, was much smaller than the veil in the temple – we can learn that it was extremely thick – inches thick – so, very heavy – perhaps so heavy and thick, it might have even been sound proof. And what was the purpose of it? Well, it was for separating the holy from the unholy. You have where God is, and then you have where the priests are, and outside of that where everybody else is. But only once a year did the priest go in the Holy of holies. And that was on the Day of Atonement. And when he went in there – where the Ark of the Covenant was, and Aaron's rod that budded, and all those things – which symbolized God's throne and His presence, he had to go in there with the blood of an animal to make atonement for the sins of the people. It was in this room, hidden behind the veil, that was where all the people were denied access. Essentially, that veil said, "Sorry, you can't come in here. This place isn't for you. And there's something secret in here and you're not

privileged to know about this now. So stay away. Keep out or die!” Because that was the edict that was given by God about going into that place.

So the meaning of all this, for Christians... a lot of people think that these days were just all Jewish harvest festivals, but actually Jesus Christ is written all over all of these holy days. And so, we find, in the New Testament, the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread and why the veil was torn in the temple. It's a mystery today only to those who are not called. The people that God has called understand this, but some others don't.

So, in Hebrews 9, it says – verse 8:

Hebrews 9:8 – *The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.*

So people were not allowed into God's presence *until* Christ died. And that was because people's sins had not yet been forgiven – because the sacrifice had not yet been made. And he explains – I'm not going to read all of it – that this separation indicated that the sacrifices the people made in the days of old were only a picture of the sacrifice of Christ to come. And they really *didn't* do any cleansing of sin or clean anybody's conscience. People were still alienated and separated from God by their sins. And the veil separated the holy – that's God – from the unholy – that's us. So people had no access to God the Father. Once Christ died, however, and our sins are forgiven, there was no need for a separating curtain between God and the people, and so, was ripped in two for all time.

You know, if the veil in the temple was as thick as the veil in the tabernacle, and if it was as tall as we think it might be, that really was quite a feat. It was ripped in two from top to bottom and pushed back. And so there is was. The Holy of holies was something nobody had ever seen before.

So, when it comes to spiritual things, because we have a hard time understanding, God did something that even a child could understand. He ripped the temple veil in two – clear picture of what was going on. It's a picture so that we can understand what has happened. And it's by this picture, Christ has revealed God the Father to humankind. So, as we said before, in the past, that curtain said, “Keep out. No admittance,” but now, that curtain torn in two opens the way into God's presence. Is says, “Come on in. It's time we had a good talk.”

Today we're celebrating that torn veil and the relationship that we have with God the Father, because of the loving sacrifice of Christ, that He made for us, and the removal of all our sins. You know, the Feast of Unleavened Bread – right? – is about having our sins removed – putting the sin away from us.

Just think about God. He's revealing Himself to us. He was, for a long time, an unknown member of the God family. And, in His talk with the disciples the night He was taken, Jesus told the disciples that He had shown them the way to the Father – or actually, he just said, “shown them the Father.” So *they* didn't know about the Father either, until He explained it to them.

And you know, if you think, too...if you read in the book of Revelation, you realize that the Being who hid Himself from mankind for four thousand years, is a Being who also, even during the millennium will *not* come down to the earth. And He will only come here when the last physical works of man are burned off the planet.

Consider this, too: Whose church is this? Whose church are you a member of? Is it the Church of Melchizedic? Or, is it the Church of Christ? No. Maybe the Church of Aaron. He was the high priest. No. We're the Church of *God*. And that's talking about the whole God family, including God the Father.

Jesus said, in chapter 17:12:

John 17:12 – *While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. He's talking to God the Father. He's praying. Those that you gave Me, I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled.*

Christ is the One that reveals us to the Father. We know that He is the head of the church, even though it is God the Father's church. We know that Jesus Christ is the commander of it. And there's another thing, too, that we need to look at in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:18 – *For through Him, we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.* I think, if I recall right, he was talking of *both*, meaning the Jews *and* Gentiles.

I can remember when I was a teenager attending church in San Jose, California, seeing our pastor, Dennis Luker, at services, pulled forty different directions at once. You know, there was anointing and counseling, and his mind was on his sermon, etc. And I could see, even as an eighteen-year-old, that he was under pressure, but I still wished I could have had a few minutes to talk to him. But that wasn't really possible, because I didn't have any big-enough problems. So, it's true that God the Father is the executive director of the universe. He does have a lot to do. But, because He is *not* limited by distance and time, He can direct the universe and also still *personally* contemplate everything every one of us needs and wants.

Look with me in Luke 12:6. This is a really poignant scripture. It says:

Luke 12:6 – *Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? So, how much is a sparrow worth? Not very much. Right? Yet none of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (That's getting easier and easier for Him in my regard.) Don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows!*

So, the fact that God has a lot to do is not any kind of impediment to Him, like it would be to us. We can ask Him for things and He can give them to us – even small things – things stolen or lost can come back, if we ask Him. Doors can open. Attitudes can change. I think most have seen things happen like this when we pray.

Right after Elaine and I were married and working in the ministry in Little Rock, Arkansas, one night after Bible study, which was held downtown in not the best neighborhood, at the YWCA, I left Elaine's Bible on top of our car while I was packing our stuff up. And, of course, as we left, it fell off. Now this Bible was not just a regular Bible, like you'd find in a hotel room. It was an Oxford wide-margin leather-bound, with pages of the finest India paper. It had all her notes from college in the margin. It was irreplaceable. And I lost it! Talk about feeling low. But we prayed about it. And six months later, we got a call from the Little Rock police. They had it. We got it back.

When I tell that story, I remember the story in the Old Testament about the guy that had the axe and the head fell off it. It was an iron axe, which was the latest tech stuff back then – like the best chain saw. And, as the axe disappeared out of sight in the water, he said, "It was borrowed," which is even worse than if it was his own. He got it back though. It floated, as I recall.

You think, "Well, wow! That floated." But, to me, it's just as impossible for that Bible to have come back, having been lost in one of the worst parts of town late in the evening. How did that wind up with the police? There's only one answer in my mind for that.

So, think about the One, also, who was the Creator and the God of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ. Here's what He's doing. Christ is taking His own blood before the Father, and He offers that to cover our sins, so that we can be clean and without sin as we enter God's presence. That's the only reason we can. We can put on the righteousness of Christ. We can put it on, like a garment, like a new suit, or a nice dress. And it makes us feel good when we do things like that.

So, now there's no separation. That's what Christ has accomplished for us. And because of Christ, we're holy and can talk with God. Speaking of Christ's role as our High Priest, Paul tells us in Hebrews 5:

Hebrews 5:4-9 – *No one takes this honor upon himself – talking about Christ's honor as High Priest. He must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take it upon Himself – the glory of becoming a High Priest – but God said to Him, "You are My Son. Today I have become Your Father. And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up many prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death. He was heard because of His fervent submission. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered.*

And once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him, and was designated by God to be the High Priest, in the order of Melchizedek.

And then Paul says something I want you to notice – very much in tune with the theme of this sermon. He said:

V-10 – *We have much to say about this, but this is hard to explain, because you are slow to learn. See, it's hard for you people to understand the things of God. The lights are on, but nobody's home. Same problem today.*

We'll listen, as we're told over and over again, that God loves us, and yet we don't draw close to Him, and we don't respond, and we don't rely on Him, because it's hard for us to believe that He's going to do those things that He's promised. It must be extremely frustrating for Him. I know it is to me in my work as a counselor. And you've had that experience, too. Sometimes we may see somebody who really needs help, and reach out to help them, or, maybe we try to talk to them. We take them out for a meal or offer to go for a walk, or write them a note, or whatever would be appropriate. But, because they're afraid or discouraged, they don't respond. So they wind up turning away from the thing that they need the most. It's like going to someone's house, and knocking on the door. No answer. And you knock again. And you knock again and again. And we still want to see them. We still care about them. But after a while, we realize the lights are on, nobody's home. So we go away, wishing someone would have answered the door. You had something for them they needed.

We're not into priests these days, really. We don't understand what that really means – that Christ is our High Priest. But here's another way to explain it. In 1 John 2:1, it says:

1 John 2:1 – *My little children, these things I write unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous.*

What is an advocate? The word there is *parakletos*. In the Greek, it means *a comforter or an advocate*. And it says: *summoned, called to one's side to, especially called to one's aid; one who pleads another's cause before a judge, a pleader; counsel for defense; legal assistant; an advocate*. Or, *one who pleads another's cause with one, an intercessor*. So, of Christ and His exaltation at God's right hand, pleading with God the Father to pardon our sins. And then, in the widest sense, *a helper; an aider; and assistant*. So, in the same way, the Spirit helps us, Paul tells us in Romans 8:26:

Romans 8:26-27 – *We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints, in accordance with God's will.*

Sometimes we're so confused – so pitiful – we don't even know what to pray for or how to pray correctly. Sometimes, all we can do is feel bad or cry. And that's where Christ steps in for us. He goes to God, and He says, "A real mess, isn't she, Father? Actually, she can do more than sob and blow her nose. I can remember feeling the same way Myself at times, when I was in the flesh. She's trying. That's why she's so upset. She needs help. She doesn't even know what she needs. But I do." We can all really talk to God about these things and He's going to listen. And He's going to listen, because Christ promises to go with us. We don't have to be afraid. That's what Jesus Christ does in this role. And He takes us to God the Father, and both of them are right there.

You know, at the Feast, we talked about the Holy Spirit being the Father and the Holy Spirit being the Son? And that's *in* us. So, when we're too upset to pray properly, He steps in. When we feel too guilty to pray, He's still with us. When we're too discouraged to pray, He's on our side. When we're too foolish to know what's good for us, He pushes us the right direction. He tells the Father what we need.

And so, on this festival time, it's good to reflect on the love, and the care, and the effort, and the concern that God and Christ send our way *always*. They offer to help. They provide the constant support we love and need. The lengths they go to so show us how they feel about us, are incredible – so much so that they tore the veil – painted us a picture – to show us what God wants us to know about us and our relationship with him.

You know, if you think about it, and you think about Adam and Eve and the fiasco that occurred in the Garden there, the Bible tells us that Christ is *reconciling* all of us back to God. It was a *breach* in their relationship with the God family, even though Adam and Eve didn't know God the Father. And *to be reconciled*, that all has to do with putting away sin from our lives, trying to be like God, and then drawing close to Him.

So, at this festival season, we can be thankful that the veil of ignorance has been torn from our minds. We don't have to be like Manoah, who couldn't grasp spiritual things. We don't have to be unknown or unknowing. Here is what Jesus said to each of us – Revelation 3:20:

Revelation 3:20 – *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice, and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me.*

God wants a relationship with us, as hard as that might be for us to understand. And because of Christ paying for our sins, when God knocks, we can open the door unafraid. We don't have to pretend, while the lights are on, that nobody's home.