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Presentation Transcript
Discerning the Body – Passover
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Guess what? It's Passover season. That may sound strange to some, but we'll get into that in a minute. As it *is* Passover, we're going to talk about why God instructs us to observe that festival.

Now, for those who don't know, in the Bible, every day begins and ends at sunset – not at midnight, like we do. The day Jesus was crucified was Passover. He died at 3 pm on the day that the Passover lamb was killed, which makes sense, if you think about it. How so? Well, let's read in John 1:28. This is talking about John the Baptist.

John 1:28-29 – *These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. He was Jesus' cousin. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!"*

So Jesus – the Lamb of God – the sacrificial Lamb of God – died on Passover, which is the same day that the sacrificial lamb was killed. Since the time of Moses, it was killed, as far as we know. And all that pictured Christ. The going through the Red Sea – Paul said that was their baptism. They were going to cross Jordan and go into a Promised Land – that's the picture of God's Kingdom. All that was pictured before.

Now, that season – when Christ was to be killed – the night before the day He was killed – which, after sundown, was also Passover, because Passover day started at sundown the night before – Jesus meet with the twelve disciples, were told, in an upper room that they'd rented for the occasion, and, at that time, He washed their feet – which was strange, because he was their leader, not a servant. And washing feet was servant's work. He told them He was doing that so that they would know that they were not supposed to lord it over, or control, or use the people that were following them, but to serve them, and take care of them, and help them grow, and build them up. And He also broke bread and told them to eat some of it. And He said that represented His body, which was to be broken for them. And then He gave them wine to drink

and told them the wine represented His blood, shed to clean us of our sins – the Lamb of God who came to save us from our sins.

Now, you may have noticed that the bread and the wine are still, in a cheap and shallow way, are still a part of modern Christian custom in some Christian groups. But now people do it whenever they want, instead of when Jesus told us to. Once a year, on the Passover, we're told to take those symbols to commemorate His death. And most people today have completely abandoned the foot washing.

Now you will notice I'm only commenting on something that's bedrock. It's in the Bible. This isn't *my* idea. I prove every day I have no idea what God wants. I always have to look to the Bible to see that. And I think we're all supposed to do that. We can get all kinds of ideas about how things should be done, but God's ways are higher than ours, and He doesn't think like we do. So, if we're going to learn anything about what He wants us to do, we always have to go to the Bible. And my comments that I have made – and I keep the Passover – because that's what it says to do.

What are looking for in the Bible when we're Christians? Well, let's go to a little letter from a man named Jude. Who was Jude? Well, the Bible tells us – in fact, Jude tells us in his book, right at the beginning – that he was the brother of James. Which James? Most scholars think it was the James who was the Lord's brother. So it's likely that Jude was either the brother, or half-brother, of Jesus. And he wrote his letter much later than most of the other letters from Paul and Peter and the Gospel writers. We can guess it was written between 55 and 80 AD. We think Paul died in 55 AD, so this is much later than that – than Paul's letters. Probably, the only thing we have in the Bible that's older than the book of Jude is the book of Revelation, which was written by John in his old age – maybe around 90 AD. Now, we know that the Romans gradually converted from the worship of Saturnalia and from worshipping him on Saturday to the worship of Mithra, the sun god, who was worshipped, of course, on Sunday. And this started to take place, probably, not long after Jesus died. They began to make that shift and it became more and more popular to worship Mithra. As that happened, it became increasingly difficult to be a Christian, because they also worshipped on Saturday and looked just like the rest of the Romans. But as the shift took place, they started to stand out. Did you know that? Yes, the church officially changed from Saturday to Sunday some 300 years after Christ died!

So what should we do today? Well, what they did then? Or what we do now? Well, Jude, in the clearest language possible, explains it. Let's look in Jude 1.

Jude 1:1 – *Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.* Then he says in verse 3:

V-3-4 – *Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were designated for this*

condemnation – ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

What were they doing then? Well they were changing church doctrine, weren't they? They were turning grace into sensuality. They were changing the teaching of grace into something else. They were saying, "Since we're all forgiven of our sins, it doesn't matter if we sin or not." Some people are still saying that. So he tells them that they should *contend* for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Now what is faith? Well, in this context, it's the way we believe, or how we live – what our actions and our beliefs are based on. Right? It's the body of beliefs and actions that we practice. And by this doctrinal change, Jude tells us they were denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now, who was it who delivered this way of believing and living to the saints? Jesus did. Right? And that's why letting it slip away is a denial of Him. And as He delivered it once – back in 28 to 31 AD – was it in need of any tweaking, or modifications, or shading, or revision? No. It was perfect just the way it was delivered, because He delivered it the way God gave it to Him.

Now, I'm not trying to make anybody uncomfortable. I'm not judging anybody. I'm only explaining why I do what I do – you know, "Give me that old time religion. If it was good for Paul and Silas, it's good enough for me." You know, it's interesting how we have a song like that in our national history. It was written by a slave person, who's natural religion was something else. But many of them converted to Christianity when they were brought here as slaves. And they understood it, it seems to me, from the songs they wrote, as well or better than the people that taught them. So, since I'm on solid biblical ground and judge no one else, I expect no judgment from any other Christian either. The Bible is the standard.

All right, let's move forward. Sometime *after* the church was founded, *after* Jesus died, *after* Peter preached his sermon where 3,000 were converted in one day, there was a man who either was, or who had been, a member of the Sanhedrin. And that was the most powerful Jewish council – probably made up of Sadducees and Pharisees, or both – who Jesus really raked on while He was walking the earth. And they had the power to judge even the priesthood. So that was the highest order of religious authority in their culture. So this man was probably highly educated. His name was Saul and he hated Christians. He wanted to kill them. There's a record in the Bible of how all the Christians of his time were afraid of him, because he was so vehemently against them. He tells us himself that he was responsible and involved in the death of a number of Christians.

Well, one day this man, Saul, was on the Damascus Road headed to Antioch to cause more trouble. He was specifically going there to try to kill more Christians. And suddenly, he found himself blind as a bat. And he tell us he fell down and heard a voice that said, "Saul, Saul, why

are you persecuting Me? You know, you're like a stubborn jackass kicking against the pricks" – kicking against the goads that they put behind the animals that pulled the carts, so that they wouldn't kick at them. And then He said, "I have a job for you. You're going to spread word of Me to the Gentiles." The Gentiles were, in his mind, probably as loathsome as Christians, because Jews looked down on everybody who wasn't a Jew in those days.

So God, in a heartbeat, took this extremist and turned him into a Christian – not just any Christian – a powerful preacher – for Him. I want to read you something about what happened after that day on the Damascus Road. It's in Galatians 1:17.

Galatians 1:17-18 - *...nor did I go up to Jerusalem to visit those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas – or Peter – and remained with him for fifteen days.*

So after his conversion, he didn't go to church authority. He went to the desert and then to Damascus for three years before going to meet Peter in Jerusalem. Now, why is he telling us this? And why did he do that? Didn't he have a job to do? I think it's pretty clear that he's telling us that what he learned he didn't learn from the church fathers – the other disciples. He was one called out of time. And he was saying that what he learned he learned from God. And we're going to see this again in a minute. So he had to receive the faith once and for all so that he could deliver it. That, we think, is what happened to him.

So, we're going to read a scripture – that he was taught directly by Christ, probably while he was in Damascus. So let's read something that's curious, but also solid bedrock. He says, in 1 Corinthians 11, to the Corinthian congregation:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.... So he didn't receive it from Peter. He didn't receive it from James. He didn't receive it from John. He received it from the Lord. What did he receive from the Lord – directly, and not from any man? ...that the Lord Jesus, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way also, He took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*

So here's somebody who didn't get this from the church. He got it from Christ years after Christ died. And what is he telling them he got? Easter? The Eucharist? No! He got the Passover – exactly what Jesus did in the Gospels on Passover night. In fact, if you'll read what comes before, you'll see he's taking them to task for not observing it properly. We're supposed to do it just as Jesus did it.

Notice, too, that he explains what the church, once and for all – as Jude said – to observe the Passover this way. Take the wine and the blood as often as you do this – so that would be once a year, wouldn't it? – to proclaim the Lord's death – for how long? – until we decide to change it to Easter? No! – until He comes. Has He come? No! So we're still supposed to be keeping it, according to what it says in the Book. I don't condemn anybody. It's just what I know, I do – or, at least try to do.

Now, in the New Testament, there's an undeniable record of the early church observing the Passover and all the other holy days that the Jews and the ancient Israelites observed as well. I can't prove it to you right now, but I have in other sermons and will continue to do so. I can prove that Jesus Christ has always been written all over all of these days. Yet, most Christians not only don't know this, or observe it, most of them have lost the understanding of why it's important. They think it doesn't matter. If you observe Easter, for example, you observe a day that came from ancient paganism. There's a book out by George Barna and somebody else. You know, George Barna is the one – Barna Institute – that does all these surveys about religion. And I forget the exact title of it, but it's about how all the holidays, that people observe today that are religious, are all based on ancient religions that were in existence way before Jesus Christ. So those things are human add-ons.

The church, after the first hundred years, began to adopt these pagan day with their pagan customs – which is something God also forbids – and they repackaged it, in the case of the Passover, as a celebration of Christ's resurrection. That would be Easter that they were observing – and again, somebody we're not told to do. But what's wrong with it? Why are we told not to do these things? What's wrong with it is that it's not a part of the perfect faith that Jesus brought to us. We're supposed to contend for *that*, not for add-ons that people thought are a good idea. We can read in the Gospels, and in Paul's writings, what God wants us to do. And we're told – just read it! – to observe instead of His resurrection, His death! That's what He was portraying on Passover evening – the night before He was killed.

Paul also explains another reason why we're to observe the Passover. It's an annual, self-conducted spiritual health check-up. Let's read about that in 1 Corinthians 11 – where we were reading before. Verse 27:

V-27 – *Whoever, therefore, eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.*

What does that mean? Well, it means that if we take it lightly, and we don't do it exactly as we're instructed, we're guilty of killing Christ – *guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord*. It's just as bad as that – behaving no better than those who jeered and mocked Him as He was being scourged and crucified. That's what Paul is saying. Paul continues:

V-28-31 – *Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For*

anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.

So there's that annual spiritual check-up. We're supposed to examine ourselves to see if we're still in the faith. Do we, by our attitude and behavior, even merit Christ's death? Now, you might say, "We can't earn forgiveness by obeying." That's true, but to be forgiven, we must be in an attitude of servanthood, of surrendering ourselves to Jesus Christ – to cooperating and working with. That's the deal. That's how we get to be forgiven. We have to change our lives. It's not that – like Jude was saying – it's not that grace is license to do wrong. We can't undo the wrongs we've done in the past, but we can surrender ourselves to God and become His servants, as Christ surrendered Himself for us.

So, do we take all this seriously? I look around – not just at all the other churches – but the one I'm in, too, and I look at myself, and I see us picking and choosing what parts of the Bible we're going to follow. Instead of being a *fulltime* servant, we're only nominal, part-time fake servants. We want the blessings – the three squares a day a servant gets – but are not available for service 24/7. Do we help the poor? Do we keep the same Sabbath Jesus kept? Do we give 10% of our gain to God's service – as Jesus made clear we should?

I was talking to somebody recently about the pastor of the biggest mega-church in our city, and how every five weeks or so, he'll go on a terror and preach about tithing, and then his church attendance will drop – because that's the kind of people that go to that church. Some of them are dedicated, and some only want to hear what they want to hear. They want to pick and choose what they're going to do out of the Bible, and then still call themselves servants of God. It just doesn't work like that.

Jesus asked a very serious question here in Luke 18:8. He said:

Luke 18:8 – *"I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily."* That's what He's saying about the people that are afflicted by the world. He said, "God is going to give them justice speedily."
"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

I mean, it's easy to talk the talk. And then we say, "It's harder to walk the walk." Right? But walking the walk is easy compared to the alternative. Things are not going to go well for anybody when Christ returns, if they're not walking the walk *and* talking the talk. Jesus said His burden was light. And I think it's hard to walk God's way in this world, but it's a whole lot easier than what else is going to happen. You know, a lot of people say, "I don't want to hear talk like that. I just want to be encouraged." Well, consider it that you're being encouraged to walk the easy walk, instead of the hard one.

But what this about being weak and ill and dead? What does that have to do with all this? Well, let's back up a few verses in 1 Corinthians 11 to pick up something. Paul said in 11:17:

1 Corinthians 11:17-22 – *But in the following instructions, I do not commend you* – he’s talking to the Corinthians here – *because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. When you come to keep the Passover, you’re doing it in a very egregious manner. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it’s not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal.* So people were bringing food to eat to the Passover service, completely missing the point of the bread and the wine. And he said: *One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.*

So here he paints us a picture of a congregation that thinks Passover service is to be a party, with some of the poorer members left to watch, on the sidelines, those who have more to eat, and who live in plenty, and who even get drunk while they sit there and go hungry. And then he explains what we already read about what Jesus told him about the Passover observance. And who are these people who are poor and have to sit hungry? Well, they’re part of the church, he tells us.

So what’s another way the Bible identifies the group of people who are the church? Well, over and over, it’s called the Church of God, and it’s also called the Body of Christ. Do you remember Paul’s analogy of one body with many members? That’s the church – the Body of Christ. Now skip down with me to verse 27 of 1 Corinthians 11:

V-27-29 – *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning – what? – the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning – what? – the body – of Christ – eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

So he’s talking about the physical body of Christ – the body that was scourged and beaten – and the blood that was shed, but I think we can make a case here, from his context, that he’s also talking about the church – to discern who is and who isn’t a part of the church, and to have respect for it in a special way. There is that one primary meaning for sure. And we *should* appreciate and understand what Christ has done for us by shedding His blood and the suffering His body endured while He was beaten. But I think he’s probably enriching the analogy to also include care for the Body of Christ. I mean, isn’t that what he was just reaming them out for – to take care of the Body of Christ – and that is, the other members of it. And then he says, in verse 30:

V-30 – *That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.*

So how can we understand what this means? Well, God has set up a big system to teach us what He needs us to learn, so that we can have eternal life. He done that the most effective way

possible. It's even been proven by psychological study and testing. God causes consequences when we do wrong and consequences when we do right. Bad consequences come from doing wrong and good consequences come from doing right. And, if we mistreat His body – the Body of Christ – that is, the other members – then it only makes logical sense that we ought not expect God to take care of our bodies either.

You know, I teach people, when their kids are talking back to them and being disrespectful, to say, “Why don't you just go in your room until you can learn to be respectful? I don't like to listen to this.” See, the connection goes right back to their misbehavior. They are in their room because they can't be respectful. And when they can be respectful, then they can come out and have another shot at it. And I think that's what God is doing here. And I suppose it's not just physically taking care of, but also treating others with respect and care.

Think for a moment about the people you know in the church. We're a bunch, aren't we? How many people have ever seen the movie, *The Princess Bride*? Hey, everybody here. How about that? Do you remember when Wesley was captured by the king had them hook him up to the life pump? Do you know any life pumps – those folks that just suck the life out of everybody else? It's so exhausting to conduct a relationship with them. Well, there are people who think Christianity is more about being doctrinally correct than taking care of everybody else. Then they want to look down on those who are “wrong.” I suppose I could go on and on. I might have to talk about myself. Maybe I already have. Anyway, you get the point. While we're thinking about all these negatives, let's look at something else Paul said – 1 Corinthians 12:12

1 Corinthians 12:12 – *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – all were made to drink of one spiritual drink.*

And on Passover service, when we read the thoughts, the prayers, and the words of Jesus, we learned that nobody comes to the Him by themselves. It was not our idea. *God* picks people that He wants in His church right now for His purposes. Right? There's an old idea saying, “You can pick your friends, but not your family” – not your relatives. Well, years ago, when Elaine and I would drive up to Durango every other week, as we were making the turn onto 528, we'd just about be at the tail end of the Jeff Foxworthy weekly top 40 countdown. And he always had a lot of funny stories to tell and tricks he'd play on people and stuff, but the most hilarious line of all to me was his closer. Every week he would say, “...your kids and hug your mama. Everybody's family's crazy!” And most of his jokes and stuff were about stuff that happened in his family growing up – or the relatives. So, it's so in our church, too – since we're all human. Our church family is just a little bit weird. And none of us is perfect. And all of us rub somebody the wrong way. But listen to what Jesus said the night before He died – John 13:34.

John 13:34-35 – *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another just as I have loved you.* Remember, He teased the apostles. He called James and John – because they were

such extremists and wanted to have Jesus bring down fire on people and all that – He called them the *Sons of Thunder* and he called Peter *Cephas*, which means *stone*. And you can think about why that might have been true. So He knew that people are different. They were a bunch of fishermen. They weren't educated like Paul. They had their own things. I think it was James' and John's mother that came to Him and wanted her sons to be top dogs in the system there. But He said, "If you love one another...: *just as I have loved you, you are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

So, if we discern the body of Christ – we know who He is, we know that even if none of us is perfect – if we love one another, that helps us fulfill our goal of drawing more people to Jesus Christ. That's what that's all about. And as things get worse and worse in society, as people know less and less about how to connect to each other, because they spend all their time on their phones, as society gets meaner and meaner, as we get more and more polarized politically – and over other issues as well – to see a group of people that really love each other stands out brighter and brighter as time goes on. And I think, too, that you can see how this pushes right into the meaning of the next festival, which is the Festival of Unleavened Bread, as it pictures the lived Christian life – a life moving toward the love of God.

If you want to hear more messages about the biblical holy days, you can go to our Website liferesource.org, click on *Holy Days* – you know, we've been talking about all seven of them for thirteen years now – and everything is catalogued – archived – so a lot of them will pop up for you, if you search on any one of them or just the term *holy days*.

So until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.