

# Love Your Neighbour

I would like to pose a question to each of us as we prepare to take the Passover. Are we taking the Passover for ourselves, for our own relationship with Christ and the Father? Is that the purpose for which we are taking it?

Many would probably say, "Yes, there is an element of truth in that. I am taking it because of my relationship with Christ and the Father."

Or do we see the Passover in larger terms than just "me and myself"? It is not just "God and me." The Passover has a much larger dimension than just "me, myself."

Ancient Israel, in coming out of Egypt, saw the Passover in terms of their own personal deliverance from bondage. Their physical well-being represented the limit of their vision.

Yet, on the other hand, for us, Passover should be based on a broader vision than just the passing over of "my" sins. It should be something greater. There should be a greater vision attached to it than just what Christ has done in paying the penalty for "my sins."

Let's spend some time in the gospel accounts relating to the last Passover that Jesus Christ experienced with His disciples. Let's look at a very important lesson that Christ conveyed to the disciples, and by extension to you and me, that is an essential lesson to learn if the Passover is going to have the fullness of meaning that it should have.

***Luke 22:7 Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed.  
8 And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat."***

So they went and did as they were instructed.

***14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.***

A little later, as He provided instruction for them, He said:

***21 "But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table.***

"The person who is going to betray Me into the hands of the Roman leaders is right here at the table with Me."

***22 "And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"***

***23 Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing.***

Jesus had made a fairly grievous comment that one of them was going to betray Him. These men had spent the last three and a half years with Jesus Christ. They may have spent a lot more than three and a half years with Him because they grew up in the same community. They were wondering who would betray their Lord and Master.

***24 Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.***

They start off discussing, "Who's going to do this?"

Then it very quickly moves from, "If this is a reality, then who's going to be in charge?" There was a dispute among them as to which of them should be considered the greatest. Who was going to be top dog? Who was going to try to lead this group of men and other disciples after this event? Who was going to be in charge until Christ came back again?

Luke tells us these things in the briefest of terms, but I think that each and every one of us have lived long enough to realise the way in which people discuss these things. "The boss is going to be away. Who's going to be in charge?" "What can I do now that I am in charge?"

There was a question of power, so Jesus responded to them:

***25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'***

***26 "But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.***

***27 "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table (in the normal human dimension)? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.***

Luke doesn't include the footwashing in this account. Where did the footwashing enter into this discussion? Had this occurred after the footwashing, after seeing Jesus Christ wash their feet as a servant?

They are in a disputation amongst themselves as to who is the greatest. Who is going to be in control? Who is going to have his hands on the reins of power? "Give me power." So Jesus Christ said, "Who is the greater? He who sits at the table, or he who serves?" We would normally say that it is the one who sits at the table. But Jesus said, "I am among you as the One who serves." He was providing them a lesson in the very character of God: how we should see one another from a godly perspective.

It is expressed a little differently in John's gospel. The focus that John gives us on this event comes somewhat after the footwashing. Having been through the experience of the footwashing and having Jesus Christ serve them, undertaking the most menial job in terms of washing their feet, they come to this matter of disputation.

John records instruction in the same vein:

***John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.***

There's a standard of how to love one another. "You are to learn to love one another the way I have loved you, not the way your mother or father did, or a favourite uncle or aunt did. You are to learn to love one another the way I have loved you."

***35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."***

Many Protestant commentators believe that Jesus Christ has created a brand new commandment here. They believe that having seen the bickering and disputations amongst the disciples, "Jesus Christ has just created the eleventh commandment, and that THIS is the important commandment for everybody to focus on, because this is the commandment of Jesus."

Unfortunately the Greek does not support that. The Greek word that is translated "new" in the English, is not *neos*. If the Greek word had been *neos* then you could argue that this was something that had just been created at that moment in time.

But John doesn't use the Greek word *neos*. He uses the Greek word *kainos* which denotes:

"...quality, something that is unused, something that is unworn or unknown or unheard of; something that may have been around for a very long time but people have never been able to focus upon and appreciate."

That's the concept that John is conveying here, and that Jesus Christ intended to convey in terms of this commandment. When we understand what Jesus Christ said as being something that has been in existence for a very long time, or something that has been unused, where does it take us to? It takes us back to Leviticus 19:18 where Moses, under the inspiration of God, told the children of Israel:

***Leviticus 19:18 ... you shall love your neighbor as yourself...***

It is the second great commandment. Jesus Christ said this was a *kainos* commandment. It was "unused." It was unheard of, unappreciated. It had been lying fallow and dormant with people failing to appreciate it.

People might ask, wasn't society BUILT on this commandment? Wasn't this the basis of Jewish society at that point in time? The rabbis, the Sadducees, the scribes and the Pharisees all talked about these things. When all is said and done, everybody knew it. Everybody could quote it verbatim - from memory. They didn't have to get out the scroll of Leviticus and scroll across to where this verse is (it didn't have verse numbers then.) They didn't have to get out a scroll and go to it. They knew where it was. They knew what it said. And of course, it wouldn't have been the "scroll of Leviticus," because it wasn't called "Leviticus" then.

Matthew records that Jesus Christ had been having a verbal jousting match with the Sadducees, pointing out to them:

***Matthew 22:29 ... "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God."***

The Pharisees who were standing in the wings thought this was wonderful. He had put the Sadducees in their place. "Let's see how we get on."

***34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.  
35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him ...***

... slow learners!

***35 ... testing Him, and saying,  
36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"***

So there was an understanding that there was a "great commandment" in the law.

***37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."***

And being Jesus Christ, He didn't stop there. He said:

***38 "This is the first and great commandment.  
39 "And the second is like it ...***

"It's of equal importance to it."

***39 ... 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'  
40 "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."***

If you want to know what is central to the whole Law of God and the whole prophetic writings, it's the love of God and the love of your neighbour. You can't separate one from the other. They are inseparable. They come as a package. You can't take one without the other. You've got to take both as 1st John 4:20 says.

***1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?***

This man asked Christ which was the great commandment. Jesus Christ answered and then presented them

with a question that they couldn't answer. But they knew and recognised that this was central to their whole society. They understood that. This question comes up, not only in Matthew's gospel, but in both Luke's gospel and Mark's gospel as well.

But there is a difference between knowing something and doing it. There is a difference between the intellectual encapsulation of committing something to the mind and then making that part of your behaviour. They are worlds apart.

It's very easy to commit something to the mind as a rote piece of memory so that you can quote it every time the professor or the lecturer asks a question on the test. You know exactly what he wants. And the only reason you've learned it is because you know you are going to be asked that question.

You can't wait for the day to get out of that class because you know you won't have to remember that piece of information any more. You are saving that space for the questions the next teacher is going to ask. That is so very, very true of the way in which we operate in life today. That's the way in which we get through our educational experiences: learning the things that are essential for that moment.

Do they have any APPLICATION to us? "That's not what I am being asked. That's irrelevant. I'm here to pass a test, and that's it."

But the problem is that OUR test has a practical application as well. It requires, not just the memorisation of something. It requires the application of it as well.

These people knew the commandment. They could memorise the commandment, but in terms of applying it, which many would say they did, they shaped it to their own advantage.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ confronted one of the "shapings" of this great commandment in terms of the people of His day. How did it get re-shaped?

***Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor ...***

... not "as yourself" ...

***43 ... and hate your enemy.'***

Jesus Christ said:

***44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,***

***45 "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.***

***46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors (or perhaps the drug peddlers of today) do the same?***

Drug peddlers keep off one another's territory. That's the way in which they love one another. "Tax collectors" doesn't have the same meaning today as it did back then. We have to choose whatever it is that our society chooses to hate, to vilify. Put that in its place. These people have respect for one another.

***46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?***

***47 "And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? ...***

"You're just the same as everybody else."

***48 "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.***

Jesus Christ took the distortion that they created themselves. They said, "I love my neighbour, and I hate my enemy." They became very selective.

We go from there and, as the man in Luke 10 tried to justify himself, we ask, "Who is my neighbour?" What was the context? It was this great commandment again: loving your neighbour as yourself.

In Luke 10, Jesus Christ gave the example of the Good Samaritan to describe who our neighbour might be. In reality, who is our neighbour? It's anyone! No - it's EVERYONE! Every other human being is our neighbour.

You might ask the corollary to that, "Who is my enemy?" Strictly speaking, no one. Yes, we have an adversary, but taking care of him is not my job. It's Somebody else's, because He's a lot more powerful than I am. Jesus Christ and the Father can take care of him with a lot more ease than all of us put together.

But in terms of human beings, each and everyone of us are a potential member of the God Family. We look around the room at people and we say, "I like this one. I dislike that one. They're not my kind. I prefer this one over that one." We have biases and preferences. We fit people into various moulds and we prefer this person to be our neighbour over that person.

But ultimately speaking, it doesn't matter what we may look like on the outside. Each and every one of us are potential members of the God Family, and as such we are neighbours, and we are to love one another as ourselves. It's a very big lesson. It's a concept that was supposed to be central to society at that time.

Jesus Christ used the word *kainos*. It was unknown, unheard of, unexperienced. You might say, "Surely it wasn't unexperienced?"

Let's stop a moment and consider the disciples. How much did the disciples love their neighbour as themselves? Have you ever thought of that? How did the disciples, during this period of time that they had walked with Jesus Christ, exemplify "loving one another as I have loved you"? Had they done that?

In Luke 9 we see a perfect example of how the disciples measured up to the standard that Jesus Christ was setting and teaching.

***Luke 9:51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, 52 and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. 54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"***

"Wow! What a wonderful opportunity! Let's consume these people, and make crisps out of them."

***55 But He (Jesus) turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.***

"How do you see those people? Do you see them as your neighbour?" No, of course they didn't. Looking at the sharpness of His rebuke to them, Jesus Christ had obviously instructed them about this beforehand.

Were they loving one another as He had loved them? I think the straightforward answer is, no. They weren't. They saw some people as being expendable. So Jesus Christ said:

***55 ... "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. 56 "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.***

... and they went with their ears a little pink! We find ourselves in that situation just as the disciples did.

What about the person who became the apostle Peter? Five chapters later, albeit the same evening, after Jesus Christ had instructed the disciples (so it should have been in his short term memory) ...

***John 18:1 When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.***

***2 And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples.***

***3 Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.***

They came with an armed detachment of troops. Eventually they come to Jesus, and He initiates a conversation. He said, "Who are you looking for?"

They said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

He said, "I am He."

Peter wasn't to be put off by a troop of soldiers with spears and swords ...

***10 Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear ...***

He wasn't much of a swordsman! He wasn't particularly good with a sword. But what leads a person to take an offensive weapon against another person? What view does a person who draws an offensive weapon have of the person upon whom he seeks to inflict an offensive weapon, whether it be a sword, spear, revolver, rifle, knife or whatever it might be? Is it loving the person as themselves? No, not at all. There's a sense of animosity and hatred there. There's a sense of hatred. John tells us:

***10 ... The servant's name was Malchus.***

***11 So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"***

One of the other gospel writers records that Jesus told Peter, "Those who live by the sword will die by the sword." That's not the standard by which we relate to other people. We don't like someone drawing an offensive weapon upon us. Most of us would be a little terrified if someone were to pull a pistol or a revolver on us and stick it in our face and start waving its cold metal an inch or two from our temples. We wouldn't feel too comfortable about it.

You have to ask yourself, even after Christ's instruction a few hours earlier, where was Peter's mind? Peter hadn't learned the lesson. He had grown up in the society in which this great commandment of loving your neighbour as yourself was so central. He had never learned the lesson. He had never come to appreciate it.

It was a very personal experience for the apostle Peter, as well as the apostle John - and undoubtedly for Malchus who probably spent the rest of his days trying to find the scar behind his ear! "I'm sure it came off! I saw it!"

After three and a half years of being with Jesus Christ, the disciples James, John and Peter hadn't learned that everyone was their neighbour and that no one was to be seen as an enemy. No doubt this was true of the other disciples as well.

We could move on from the immediate twelve and we could look at Saul. Here was a man who was going around putting people who wanted to follow Christ, into prison.

In Acts, Luke describes him as being a murderer. The apostle Paul himself actually raises the ante. He called himself a "blasphemer." For a blasphemer, there was only one penalty and that was the death penalty.

Having killed other people, he could claim to have been a zealot. He could have claimed to have been like Judas Maccabees. He could have claimed to be like the priest Eliezer. He could have claimed to have been someone who was seeking to defend God's people, and he could have been exonerated.

See how the apostle Paul described himself:

***1 Timothy 1:13 although I was formerly a blasphemer ...***

... a person for whom there was only one penalty that was worthy, and that was the death penalty: to be stoned to death.

What was common in each of these situations?

***Luke 22:25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'***

Jesus Christ said that they weren't to be the "benefactors." What was the situation of being a benefactor? The whole purpose of being a benefactor was that you could control others; you could have power over others. You could exercise that control and power. Someone who was a benefactor was someone who was a centre of power of influence or control over others.

The same Greek expression that is translated "benefactor," is used of Vespasian by Josephus. When he came to some of the cities and towns in Galilee, the people opened the doors of the city to him, to let him in. They looked upon him as being their benefactor, recognising his benefaction upon them.

It was a matter of control. Why did the disciples find themselves in this situation? We could easily say that it was a lack of God's Holy Spirit which is absolutely true. But they didn't see the whole purpose of God. They saw God's purpose in relation to themselves. It was, "me and God" and "hades to the rest." That's not the way in which God looks upon His creation.

Here is another insight into a little bit of the internecine problems between the disciples. We don't know how many brothers Peter had, so it may not have been Andrew who was the problem on this occasion. Maybe Peter was just using Andrew, his brother, as a hypothetical example. We don't know. Maybe he was having real problems with Andrew at this point in time. We don't know, but we do learn some very interesting instruction in how we should look upon one another.

***Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came to Him (Jesus) and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me ...***

One day we can ask Andrew whether he was causing problems to Peter!

***21 ... how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"  
22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.***

... and if you forget where you get to along the line, you've got to start all over again! You can't have a wild guess as to where you got to last time, and carry on from there.

Perhaps the question that Peter was asking was, "How quickly can I move someone from being a neighbour to being an enemy? How soon do I have to stop being concerned about him as my neighbour and can look upon him as someone who is hostile to me?"

Jesus Christ smashed that idea on the head. Why do people want to have enemies? So that they could oppose them, so that they could seek to have power over them.

So we return to the situation with which we started: who was going to be the greatest and have the most power over others? That's the concept that people want. In this day and age we have current jargon about being "empowered." People want to be empowered. People want to have control.

One of the great debates in the political sphere in this country on the subject of abortion is the aspect of a woman having "control" over her own body. The problem is, that is looking at life from the wrong perspective.

If we go back to the time before the Exodus, we are introduced to Moses. We find Moses in a similar situation to the disciples, and he has a very human reaction to the world around. Moses grows up in Pharaoh's court.

***Exodus 2:10 And the child grew, and she (his mother who was his nurse) brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, "Because I drew him out of the water."***

Then a curtain is pulled on Moses' life. A little child, weaned of its mother, maybe three or four years of age, is now a part of Pharaoh's court.

The curtain rises again when he is a grown man. We don't necessarily know with any degree of definitiveness what happened during that period of time. He became a very successful general in Pharaoh's army, and was able to lead armies against the Ethiopians and others.

That's not the concern here, although it's interesting to see the way in which Moses responds to situations. He responds as a general, with power and control; with power of life and death over another person - or so he thought.

Having been an influential person in Pharaoh's court:

***11 Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens ...***

Moses doesn't tell us what he understood about his relationship to the Children of Israel. Reading between the lines, he had an understanding that he had a responsibility towards these people, that his birth was miraculous. He had been saved. He had been drawn out of the rivers of the Nile for a specific purpose. That is an inference that is given.

***11 ... And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren.***

He did a quick take of the circumstances ...

***12 So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.***

... just like "Ginger," an Egyptian "mummy" in the British Museum in London, that dates perhaps up to a thousand years before this period of time. He was recovered from the sands of Egypt. His body is totally dehydrated. The skin is still on his bones, but it is hard, dry leather. He had been buried in the sand.

Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand and thought, "One down, many more to go." This man may still be lying out there under the sand like Ginger was. Moses' attitude was: "Here is someone who is opposing my people: bang, bang. He's been taken care of."

God does kill a few more Egyptian lives before the situation is over.

***13 And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, "Why are you striking your companion?"***

"Look, you are brothers! Why are you carrying on like this? He's not your enemy - the Egyptians are!"

***14 Then he said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"***



Aah! Somebody knew! Of course someone had to know. The guy who the Egyptian was beating yesterday was abundantly aware of what happened to the Egyptian. He probably went home and told about Moses, and the way in which he took care of this Egyptian. The news probably spread like wildfire through all of the Israelites. All of a sudden, Moses wasn't so sure of the ground on which he stood. It really was shifting sand! He had to flee for his life.

The Passover and the Exodus from Egypt was not going to be accomplished by the way in which human beings want to accomplish things. We want to accomplish things by force of might and power and control. What would the Israelites really have liked to have done to the Egyptians? Their solution to the problem would have been to make them slaves, and treat them just the way they had been treated!

But the Eternal took them out of there. "You are not going to learn from these people. You are not going to learn this way."

At the Passover, Jesus was not talking about the way in which this world exercises power and control over one another. It's destructive. It's brutal. And every generation of humanity finds itself mired in it. They don't understand this aspect of loving your neighbour as yourself. It gets to the very heart of human relationships AND of our relationship with our Creator.

As I said, the Eternal killed a lot of people in Egypt before it was all over. There's a difference between me killing a person, and the Eternal taking a person's life. I can't resurrect them to life! I can't open their mind to the truth of God! The Eternal can do that. The Eternal can take a person's life out of the way for the time being and say, "I will deal with you later. I will open your mind to the truth. I am dealing with this group of people at this point in time." The Eternal operates on a totally different level to you and me.

Yet so often people take the comments that the Eternal says about smashing the wicked and destroying nations who oppose His rule, and they think that that is the way in which WE have got to operate against one another.

What did Jesus Christ base His teaching upon? Moses had to learn the same lesson as well. Moses was the meekest man who lived. He could be classified in that way because he came to realise something about other human beings: that they had to be respected.

***Matthew 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"***

Could it be that this was a little bit of an obsession with them? Were they a little power hungry? "We are going to win at the end of the day, and who's going to be the greatest? Who will be on Your right hand and on Your left hand?"

***1 ... "Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?"  
2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,  
3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.  
4 "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.***

Children don't have great ideas about control and power over other human beings. That is still to be learned, too quickly I am afraid. Their parents may feel that they've got a lot of control and a lot of power over them but that's because they want to serve them too.

But a child is not possessed with these ideas of control and power that adults find themselves preoccupied with. So Jesus Christ said, "Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."

***5 "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.***

What place has a child got in our lives? How do you see another child? Ultimately speaking, a child is not as one midwife once described: a megaphone at one end and no responsibility at the other!

A child is a potential member of the Family of God! It's a physical, breathing human being at this point in time, but it's destiny is not just to be a human being. It's ultimate destiny is to be a member of the God Family. How do we look at one another? How do we see one another? How do we see the rest of humanity?

What happened after the mother of Zebedee's sons asked Christ that her sons sit at His right hand and left hand in the Kingdom?

***Matthew 20:24 And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.***

A lot of politics were going on amongst these disciples! They knew how to gang up on one another. They were carnal. They did not have God's Holy Spirit. They saw their position from a human, carnal perspective.

***25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.***

***26 "Yet it shall not be so among you ...***

"This is not the way in which we are to conduct ourselves one to another."

***26 ... but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.***

***27 "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave -***

***28 "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."***

So if you want to be great, you've got to be a servant. If you want to have power, you've got to be a slave. This is setting the world on its ear! This is turning everything upside down! This is contrary to all human understanding of how the world operates.

And yet it is the life to which we are called!

***Matthew 23:11 "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.***

It is interesting to see how frequently Matthew returns to this point. Maybe it is something that he had to learn the hard way himself, and it really stuck with him; it really meant something to him.

***12 "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.***

You don't seek glory for yourself.

Paul speaks about Jesus Christ's own example in Hebrews 2.

***Hebrews 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things ...***

Who are we talking about? We are talking about a Being for whom everything has been created! It's all His toy! He can do with it what He wants! It's all His. He has total control, total power over it!

Not only was it FOR Him, but it was also BY Him as well. But He had a greater purpose:

***10 ... in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.***

***11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,***

He then quotes from the Psalms:

***12 saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You."***

***13 And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."***

Paul is taking examples from the Psalms to show the relationship that Jesus Christ wants to have with His creation. He wants us to be brethren! He wants us to be family! It becomes very clear ...

***14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,***

He has the ability to destroy the adversary. And how did He do so? By making Himself flesh and blood, and in the process ...

***15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.***

Is this an example of the greatest Being, the Servant of all? Of course it is. One who was a Spirit Being, which is something that is beyond our comprehension, empties Himself of His Godhead and becomes a human being to live a life and to die so that you and I could have a part with Him for eternity!

Jesus Christ instructed the disciples about giving, outgoing concern, being a servant, being a slave: all of the things that they had no comprehension of, despite the fact that the second command was the cornerstone of society - "provided that it's not a Gentile, or provided that it's not my enemy."

Christ was going to release those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

***16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.***

***17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation (payment, atonement) for the sins of the people.***

... to serve us in that way.

***18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.***

This was not just a one-off thing. As our High Priest, He continues to serve us, because He understands the frailty of our human frame. He lived for 33 1/2 years and He saw it. He appreciated it. He instructed men for three and a half years and He saw the frailty of their frame without God's Holy Spirit. He watched over that fledgling Church as it grew, and He saw the frailty of the people that were part of it. And He continued to serve them. He continued to be their servant.

So He is able to help those who are tempted. This comes in very, very powerfully in terms of the role that you and I have in the Church.

After Jesus Christ had been resurrected, He appeared to His disciples and taught them for a number of days. Matthew tends to gloss over this time. He brings us to the end, just before the ascension of Jesus:

***Matthew 28:16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.***

***17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.***

***18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.***

"Because I have been the Servant of all, all power and all authority is given into My hand."

**19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.**

Jesus Christ said that He had all power. To use the jargon of today, He "empowered" the disciples to go and do something: to go and make disciples of all nations.

What was the characteristic of a disciple? How did Jesus Christ say the people would know that someone is a disciple of His?

**John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.  
35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

"... that you get hold of this great commandment, and that you understand what God's purpose is; not just for yourself, but for all humanity."

If they were going to make disciples in that model, what does it say about themselves? What sort of people did they have to be? Did they not have to be model disciples as well? Did they not have to then exemplify that loving of one another? I think that's a "given." They were given power as they learned to SERVE one another.

You and I are given power as we learn to serve. That's what it's all about. It's a conditional statement. It's an empowerment that is conditioned upon obedience to God, and obedience to God by His standards: the standards that Jesus Christ set of how you love your neighbour as yourself; not the standard that society sets where a person could switch from being a neighbour to being an enemy several times a day.

It requires that we be servants of one another just as Jesus Christ was the Servant of all humanity.

Jesus Christ was taken from the disciples. They received power on the Day of Pentecost. What happened after the Day of Pentecost?

In Luke 22:25, Luke used the term "benefactor." I said that we would come back to it. The term "benefactor" is used twice in the book of Acts, and once in Paul's writings. It's interesting to see the attitude change in terms of the disciples.

Acts 4 records that Peter and John had been able to heal a crippled man at the gate of the Temple. It created a stir in the Temple because this man was now fully healed. Peter and John are brought before the rulers. They are released, and they are brought into captivity again.

**Acts 4:5 And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes,  
6 as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.  
7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"**

... we're back to "power" again. "You are undermining MY power. You are undermining my control. I want to take your power away from you so that you don't unsettle MY power."

**8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel:  
9 "If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well,  
10 "let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ**

***of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.***

That really wasn't what they wanted to hear! But it is instructive from another point of view because this verse uses a variation of the term "benefactor." In the term "a good deed" there is "benefaction"! This is a "giving" benefaction. The disciples are involved, not as the princes of the world in seeking benefaction for themselves; now they are GIVING benefaction to others, by this good deed to this helpless man, to this "waste of society" that sat there in his rags at the gate of the Temple, and begged for a coin.

Peter went to speak to Cornelius. He recounted to Cornelius the vision that he had seen and the realisation he had had, that God had set the situation up. He had a lesson to learn in terms of his relationships with other people. Peter went and SERVED these Gentiles.

***Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.***

You might say that here was another point in Peter's education about loving neighbour as yourself. "Who is my neighbour?" suddenly took a quantum leap for Peter earlier in this chapter.

***35 "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.***

***36 "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ - He is Lord of all -***

***37 "that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:***

***38 "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.***

The "doing good" is from the same Greek word that we came across earlier. It is the verb from the noun in Luke 22. Jesus Christ was now seen as being a Benefactor, doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him, taking care of those who couldn't take care of themselves.

The other occasion in which this term is used is in 1st Timothy, where the apostle Paul is instructing Timothy about the way in which Church members were to conduct themselves.

***1 Timothy 6:1 Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.***

... bondservants, labourers, employees. That is the situation that the majority of us find ourselves in today. We are employees of someone else. We have to answer to somebody else. He said, "Count your masters worthy of all honour so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed."

Don't go about trying to undercut the boss, because that's not the way in which power is achieved. Power is achieved through service, and that power is not for the self, it's for the benefit of others. It serves others.

He continues, and refines it a little:

***2 And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren***

...

Don't think that you are someone great because you are part of the same Church as your boss. I'm glad I'm part of the same Church as MY boss! I hope you are too. But obviously, in a day and age in which slaves existed, you could see the way in which a master and a slave could end up in the same congregation. The slave could find himself getting a little carried away with himself. Paul continues:

***2 ... but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.***

Once again, the word "benefited" is the exact same word that is derived from "benefactors" in Luke 22:25.

What do the three examples that we have looked at in Acts and Timothy talk about? They talk about outgoing concern. They talk about serving other people, helping, finding a spot that needs filling, or someone who needs some help and seeking to lift them up, irrespective of who they are, or what they may be.

As the apostle Paul was saying, just because we are in the Church together, it's not a basis for contempt of one another. Sadly, it does happen, but it shouldn't happen.

Let me make a caveat. People talk of power and control. People talk of oppression. The natural extension of that for most people is, "I don't want anyone to tell me what to do."

This world abounds with ideas. Even in the theological world we have "liberation theology" and "feminist theology," which are all very concerned about oppression, which, in many cases, DOES exist, make no mistake about it. There is oppression in this world. That's one of the reasons why we take the Passover, because this world is oppressed.

But oftentimes when people talk about it, they want to throw it off. They don't want anyone else to tell them what to do.

Brethren, we are offered the opportunity of having power and control, not on our own basis, not for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others. God says, "I will give you power and influence. I will give you the opportunity to direct things - provided you do it on My basis, and My basis alone."

Being empowered doesn't mean that we get everything OUR way. A little child is served by its parents. A little child likes ice-cream three times a day, but his mother won't give it to him. Why? Is it because she is evil, empowering, and controlling him? No. As a mother, she realises what's good for him or her. Having a little bit of broccoli and some green vegetables helps the body, and an ice-cream, by itself, is not good.

We are in the same situation. Oftentimes we think, "I'm serving therefore I should have such and such."

What has happened? We've slipped the rails somewhere, because now we are thinking about what we "deserve." We are thinking about being a benefactor in terms of Luke 22:25. We have forgotten about Matthew 28, that we are still subject to God, and God watches over us as children. God allows situations in our lives that He thinks is appropriate for us, because He may think that all WE want is ice-cream, and a good dose of salad may do us good! It may benefit us. We have to bear that in mind.

There is another caveat that ties right in with the instruction that Jesus Christ gave the disciples in Matthew 24. It was a warning; a warning given to each and everyone of us. Matthew 24 contains the "Olivet Prophecy." Matthew 19 tells us that Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem, so this is all set out for us in the context of the last week of Jesus' life. The Olivet prophecy happens as a prelude to the Passover.

With that in mind, consider what Jesus said:

***Matthew 24:12 "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.***

It will get lukewarm. It won't become as relevant. We don't see the need for it. We don't see the application of it.

Jesus Christ made that comment in terms of the context of the Passover. He told us that we were to love one another. We are to have godly love, *agape*, for one another - as He did for us. His love did NOT become lukewarm. It didn't "grow cold," as verse 12 says. It retained its heat and its vigour until His last breath was drawn.

His love for us continues to this very day.

So we come back to the initial question: When we take the Passover, for whose benefit do we take it? Is it for just "me and God"?

If we do it that way, we are missing the whole point of what the Passover is about. Because the Passover is about ALL humanity. It's about the relationship that you and I have with each and EVERY human being who walks this earth.

Do I see them as my neighbour?

Do I have the same feeling for them as Jesus Christ had for me?

If I do, I take the Passover as a DISCIPLE of Jesus Christ.

*... Peter Nathan*

*16 Apr 05*

[Back to Top](#)

[Back to Sermon Summary List](#)