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# The Meaning of Maundy Thursday



Greetings to you as you celebrate Easter Week! In England, the Thursday of Holy week is known as Maundy Thursday. The word “maundy” is the Latin word for “mandate, or commandment”. The mandate that is being referred to, was given at the Last Supper when Jesus turns to his disciples and says, “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*” (John 13:34)

In order to understand the significance of Maundy Thursday and this “new mandate”, we have to understand what the “old mandate” was and where it came from and how it was fulfilled so we can have a new mandate. To do that we have to go back 4000 years to Genesis 15:8-18. Here, God has just told Abraham that He was going to multiply his descendants to be as many as the stars of the sky and that God would give him the land to inherit. Abraham asks God how he can be sure this will happen. So God tells Abraham to take heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. He divided the animals in two and set their parts on either side of the path and the birds were also placed on either side. Then a great darkness came and God in the form of a smoking furnace passed between the pieces. And the story stops there.

This passage describes a mysterious ritual, which is bewildering to the reader unless it is looked at from an historical perspective.

At this time, Abraham was living in the city of Hebron (about 19 miles south of Jerusalem, or Salem, where Abraham had just met with Melchizadek). His neighbors were of the tribe of Heth, who was the great grandson of Noah and they were known as Hittites. They were the ones who developed what was known as the Hittite Treaty, or covenant. This treaty developed because of the mistrust people had for one another in this day.

At this time most people on earth lived in city-states and were under constant fear of being attacked. The king of a small city (the “vassal” king) was especially vulnerable, so he would seek protection by seeking to make a treaty with a stronger king (or “Suzerain king”). The treaty, or covenant, was designed so that the greater army would protect the lesser king and fight with him if he was attacked. In return, the lesser king would agree to pay the greater king taxes or give him the fair maidens or whatever they agreed to. Once the terms of the treaty were agreed upon, it would become a blood covenant.

They would seal the covenant with this ritual; by taking an animal and cutting it in two,

and placing the pieces on either side of a path. Then the “lesser” king would walk between the pieces and say these words, “Let this be done to me and more so, if I do not fulfill my part in this covenant.”

This is why it was called a blood covenant; because if the lesser king did not do what he said he’d do, the greater king would legally kill him. The covenant was in force until one of the kings died. Only then could the blood covenant be broken. (by the way this is the type of covenant that a husband and wife enter into when they marry and say the words, “until death us do part.”)

What makes the story in Gen 15 so amazing is that Abraham (the lesser king) did not walk between the animals, but the Greater King; God Himself walked between the cut upon animals and in essence said, “*Let this be done to me and more so if Abraham does not fulfill his part of this covenant.*”

At this moment God took 100% of the responsibility for this covenant and the relationship between Him and Abraham. This is the perfect example of the love of God. God’s responsibility in this covenant was that He would protect Abraham including his yet unborn descendants, multiply them, and give them the land He had promised to them. Abraham’s responsibility was to perfectly serve God, love and obey Him. Abraham’s part of the covenant is summed up when God tells Abraham “*be thou perfect*”. (Gen 17:1)

How did Abraham and his descendents do with their part of fulfilling the covenant? Did they walk perfectly before God? No, they repeatedly failed and broke the laws God gave to them. They were unable to fulfill the covenant. Abraham and all his descendants should have died and been cut in two. But in this covenant God walked between the animals and said He would suffer the consequences for Abraham breaking it.

The Covenant was broken. The price must be paid. The King who walked between the cut upon animals had to die. But God is a Spirit, how can He die? In order to pay the penalty and fulfill the blood covenant, God would have to first become a man. Only if God became a man, could He die. So in the fullness of time, Jesus the God-man was born as a vulnerable baby, for the sole purpose of fulfilling this covenant and dying.

Now let’s fast forward to the Maundy Thursday. It’s the Last Supper and we have to be able to visualize what is taking place. The disciples are not sitting around a table like in the Leonardo daVinci painting. Actually, Jesus and all the disciples are laying on their left sides on blankets and pillows on the floor (propped up by their left elbows). They lay round a large bowl filled with food and their feet go outward from the bowl like spokes on a wheel. They are dipping into the bowl with pieces of unleavened bread similar to a tortilla. This is called a sop.

John is laying on the right side next to Jesus. Jesus begins the supper by saying to all of them, “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*” (Jn 13:21) While everybody is talking amongst themselves wondering who is going to betray Jesus, John leans back and put his head on Jesus’ breast so his ear was a couple inches from Jesus’ mouth and asked him “*Lord, who is it?*” *Jesus answered,* (He whispered to John “in a still small voice”) “*He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly.*” Jn 13:25-27)

At that moment Judas left the room to betray Jesus. Now Jesus knew that the wheels were in motion for the Old Covenant to finally be fulfilled. At this moment Jesus knew He was soon to die. Then He turns to His disciples and gives them the new mandate; (the new covenant), to “*love one another as I have loved you.*”

That’s different from when Jesus said we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. Now we are to love one another as Christ has loved us.

And how did Jesus love us? He took 100% of the responsibility for Abraham and his descendants breaking the old covenant of Gen 15. Jesus died in our stead and took 100% of the blame for our sins. That’s how Jesus said we are to love one another. We are to take the blame for one another, even when the other party is guilty. Love is more important than being right. Has your husband or wife offended you? Take the blame and choose to love her anyway. God knows who is right. Be content with that. Take 100% of the responsibility for the relationship. This is the New Covenant, the New Testament, the New Mandate.

“Maunday Thursday” (cont.)

But did Jesus literally fulfill the covenant? Did He actually get cut in half like the animals in Gen 15? It's true He had a spear thrust in His side and blood and water gushed out. He had a crown of thorns shoved down on His head and blood streamed down His face. He was whipped and the flesh on His back was torn apart. Yes, he was mutilated and horribly tortured, but was he actually cut in half like the animals of the covenant? ... I believe He was.

What were one of the last statements Jesus uttered on the cross? He said “*My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?*” (Matt 27:46) At that moment, for the first time in eternity, God the Father and God the Son were cut in two. They were divided. Jesus took our sin on the cross and because sin cannot be in the presence of a Holy God, God the Father turned His face away from His Son and Jesus descended into Hell like a common sinner. The Godhead was cut in two. Jesus died. The covenant was finally fulfilled and therefore it no longer exists. We are free from the laws of the Old Covenant and our trying to be perfect people. The Law of what we should do, what we ought to do, and what we need to do, no longer applies to us. The Law is dead.

This is why Jesus could give them (and us) a new mandate, which is to love one another. If we are honest with ourselves, we admit that we can't fulfill this new mandate any better than we could fulfill the Old Law. That kind of sacrificial love does not come from within us. The love we need to love our enemies and bless them that curse us, does not exist within us. We have to find this love outside of ourselves.

On Friday, when Christ died, the most amazing thing happened - the veil in the Temple was ripped in two from the top to the bottom. The curtain that separated man from God opened up and gave us access to come into God's presence just like Adam in the Garden.

Then on Sunday, the greatest miracle in the history of mankind took place! The Holy Spirit raised up Jesus Christ from the dead and He is again alive and united with the Father. The Trinity is again made whole! We now have access to enter into the Holy of Holies and come into the presence of God and interact with Him and to love Him as a bride loves her husband. And it is only when we are crucified with Christ can we walk through the torn veil (which is his flesh, Heb 10:20) and come into the presence of God where He fills us with His love, and His joy and His peace so that we can love one another.

Now we are able to take 100% of the blame and choose to love one another. No longer do we have to feel compelled to point our finger at one another's sins. Now we can demonstrate the love God has for us to one another and take the blame. Now we discover that love is more important than being right. Jesus was perfect and He took all the blame for our sins and suffered for it. He died instead of us. We can now love one another the same way.

This is the story of Easter. This is the Gospel.

May you have a blessed Easter celebration as you walk through the veil into the presence of God and enjoy Him forever.

In Christ,

