

GUILT, PAIN, SICKNESS, SORROW, SHAME, GRIEF

The very first Passover, 1446 BC.

The white tufts of his thick coat of wool gave the appearance of purity. The fact that he was a year old, the best of his flock – unblemished, untarnished, unmarked made him desirable and beautiful. But in Egypt, on this year, 1446 BC, this lamb, among many other beautiful lambs, was chosen not to win a trophy at the state fair or to stand proud because of his extraordinary wool. No, this lamb was chosen to stand in the place of its owner and to, figuratively, bear for him and his family, every measure of burden, pain, sickness, sorrow, grief and shame. This lamb would absorb it all.

And then, having known the pains of its owner, this lamb would give up his very lifeblood so that the owner might be able to walk free from his bondage in Egypt and head toward the Promised Land. This lamb was the symbol of the chains around this family's wrists – the shackles of their own guilty, sinful lives – and the handcuffs of all they had suffered under the tyrannical reign of the Egyptians.

This lamb then, went forward to its slaughter, his blood to be painted along the doorposts of his owner so that the Angel of Death would pass over the house – so that God's rescue would take a form as the Israelites obeyed His word, and punished these lambs for the sins and pains and sorrows of their owners.

And the houses of the believing Israelites breathed a huge sigh of relief as they listened to the moaning and wailing of those Egyptian families nearby who had no substitute, and who paid a steep price as God's wrath was poured out against their firstborn sons.

Soon, the mass of Israelites, having been rescued by the blood of their lambs, gathered together and headed away from their terror and toward a new life of freedom. Their God had worked a miracle and forced the hard heart of the Pharaoh to let God's people go. The lambs had taken their pain, and their feet were now free to journey toward a future life of joy.

The lamb. What a role he had for this people, in this time -- for Israelites, sons and daughters of Abraham, to be rescued from this specific tyranny in Egypt. What an incredible victory.

But the truth is, his rescue didn't last for a very long time.

In very short order the same people find themselves struggling again and again as they deal with other tyrants, others sins, other sorrows, shames and sicknesses. Their life, chronicled in the Old Testament, is a tale of woe, of failure, sin, pain and suffering. Their story, one of fallen-ness, brokenness, and unrighteousness.

Because, you see, those lambs ultimately could not truly be their substitute once and for all. They couldn't take care of the problems and pains forever.

But there IS one who could and would. One to whom those Passover Lambs were to highlight. His name is Jesus, and He is far more than a temporary, wooly creature who had a role to play in 1446 BC. No. He is God, in the flesh, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

But He came, as the Lamb of God, to absorb our pain. He came, as the Perfect One, to offer His very lifeblood to give us strength amid our pain.

What pain?

1. The pain of sin, that stalks us and grabs us and seeks to control us. Sin, the faults and the failures and the flaws. Sin: the anger, pride, jealousy, greed, self-centeredness, lust, indifference. Sin: the Old Adam, that makes us blind, dead, and enemies of God.

But that's not the only pain Jesus came to endure – Jesus came to absorb.

2. He also came for the pain of our past – the sinful actions of others that have burdened us. He came to carry the bullying and the abuse, the mistreatment and the criticism, the loud and angry words from people who should've hugged us and the indifference from those who should have cared. He came to carry our regrets, our bad judgments, our embarrassments, shameful days, lonely days – the things we regret doing and the things we regret not doing.

But that's still not all He came to absorb. There's other pains too.

3. The pain of sickness: the cancer, the heart disease, the diabetes, arthritis, colitis, -- the headaches, and the heartburn, the cataracts and the hearing loss – the Alzheimers and the Autism. Every manner of sickness was laid upon His body on the cross.

And that not to mention the depression, the addiction, the heartbreak, the heartache, the loneliness, the anxieties, the tension and dissension.

But that's still not all.

4. What about the grief – the loss of one you loved – a husband, a daughter, a grandson, a niece. What about tragedies and accidents and the times when life seems unfair.

5. And then there's the world and its dangers: from fires and floods, to earthquakes and tornados. From crime and violence, to government corruption and the threat of war.

For all of it, Jesus came to be the Lamb of God. He came to shed His blood so that you and me, and our world of pain, and our broken bodies, and our struggling spirits might know the freedom of forgiveness, the freedom of God's compassion, understanding through His own experience of pain and suffering.

As the Son of God, He was above it all; but as the Son of Man He knew it all. As the God of the Universe His holiness demanded justice; but as the Lamb of God His love cried out for mercy.

And the end result is what we have here today. He offers you His very own body and blood to cover over the doorposts of your house so that the Angel of Death might pass-over. He declares "take eat," "take drink" so that you might be set free from the bondage of your pain and your sin and take your journey to the Promised Land.

So, come. Please come. His hands are open to forgive you. His arms are ready to embrace you. And, unlike that Passover lamb 4000 years ago whose work was temporary and whose rescue transitory; His grace will be with you forever and ever and ever.

Come, come as you are. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.