

DELIVERED

PSALM 116

“Why is this night different from every other night?” Jewish boys ask this question of their fathers every Passover. It begins the Seder meal, that meal where Jewish people recount everything God had done for the Israelites in delivering them from the hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

It is unlikely that anyone asked this exact question on the night our Lord was betrayed in that Upper Room, but it is a very good question, nonetheless. What makes this night so different? Why gather here on a Thursday night in the middle of the week? Because tonight is the night of nights for us, the big night, because of our need for deliverance, because of the price for our deliverance, and because of the means that God uses to deliver us.

In order to understand our need, we first have to look back to Israel. Israel on the night of the first Passover had been in bondage for four hundred years. They had slowly but surely moved from being guests of Pharaoh’s house to being feared slaves. There were so many of them that Pharaoh was not sure what to do with them. What if they sought to overthrow him? Out of fear he put them in bondage. And that bondage only got worse as time went on. Their bondage got to the point where life itself was really at stake for them. Nine times through Moses God had begged and commanded and urged Pharaoh to let His people go, and nine times Pharaoh refused. Finally, God sent the angel of death to come and take the firstborn of all Egypt, to crush Pharaoh and his armies, and to release God’s people from their slavery.

This, of course, is not unlike our bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil. Our slavery may not always seem too hard. There certainly are times when the slavery of sin seems more appealing than the freedom of the cross. But make no mistake about it—it is slavery.

Your slavery is such that death itself surrounds you. The enemies around you are so great that it is impossible for you to escape on your own. Like the Israelites so many years ago, only God Himself can deliver you from this bondage.

This deliverance does not come easy. Your deliverance has a price. On that first Passover night the Israelites sacrificed a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts. That lamb was but a shadow and a picture of the one great Lamb who was to come. This Lamb is Christ, our soul’s great friend. This Lamb offers Himself up this night for you, and even prepares to suffer the

pangs of Sheol itself. In a few short hours He will cry out with the psalmist, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

So on the night when our Lord is betrayed, the night when He makes this one, great sacrifice for all people and all time, He meets with His disciples. He serves them, washing their feet as a sign of humility. He acts as their slave. He then delivers the greatest of all gifts to them. He delivers them Himself. He gives them His body and His blood to eat and to drink. The Israelites of old ate of the Passover lamb to remind them of God’s deliverance from the Egyptians. But now, all of God’s people eat and drink of the one, great Passover Lamb without spot or blemish. He is the true and perfect sacrifice not made with hands.

So what does this mean for you, dearly beloved? What this means for you is simple, profound, and beautiful. It means that this night we remember that Jesus’ sacrifice is once and for all. But when we remember, it isn’t something really that we do. We remember because Jesus gives Himself to us. It is His work, this holy remembering. He sacrifices Himself on the cross, and now delivers that one, great sacrifice to you in His body and blood. This is, quite literally, how we remember His death. This is how we are delivered. We remember His death by participating in it. By eating His body and His blood, we show the world that Jesus died, that He rose again from the dead, and that He now sits at the right hand of God, where He gives Himself for the life of the world.

God Himself actually gives you this deliverance tonight. As we pray in the catechism:

What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?

These words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” shows us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

This night is unlike any other night. This is the night when Jesus delivers you from the great enemies of sin, death, and the power of the devil. This night God delivers His people. The angel of death passes over you and rests upon Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He pours His own blood into the cup of salvation, so that you may drink of His deliverance to the full. Come, repent of your sins. Come, feast upon the Lamb who was slain. Come, lift up the cup of salvation, and rejoice in His mighty salvation for you. Our God delivers. Amen.