

April 13-17, 2020 Edition

The Year Of Cultivating #15

Cultivating Memory: The Passover, The Last Supper & Jesus' Uncanny Timing

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

April 11/12, 2020

CULT



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday:

While the Israelites were still in the land of Egypt, the Lord gave the following instructions to Moses and Aaron: "From now on, this month will be the first month of the year for you.

Announce to the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each family must choose a lamb or a young goat for a sacrifice, one animal for each household. If a family is too small to eat a whole animal, let them share with another family in the neighborhood. Divide the animal according to the size of each family and how much they can eat. The animal you select must be a one-year-old male, either a sheep or a goat, with no defects. "Take special care of this chosen animal until the evening of the fourteenth day of this first month. Then the whole assembly of the community of Israel must slaughter their lamb or young goat at twilight.

They are to take some of the blood and smear it on the sides and top of the door frames of the houses where they eat the animal. That same night they must roast the meat over a fire and eat it along with bitter salad greens and bread made without yeast. Do not eat any of the meat raw or boiled in water. The whole animal-including the head, legs, and internal organs-must be roasted over a fire. Do not leave any of it until the next morning. Burn whatever is not eaten before morning. "These are your instructions for eating this meal: Be fully dressed, wear your sandals, and carry your walking stick in your hand. Eat the meal with urgency, for this is the Lord's Passover. On that night I will pass through the land of Egypt and strike down every firstborn son and firstborn male animal in the land of Egypt. I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt, for I am the Lord! But the blood on your doorposts will serve as a sign, marking the houses where you are staying. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt. "This is a day to remember. Each year, from generation to generation, you must celebrate it as a special festival to the Lord. This is a law for all time. Exodus 12:1-14 (NLT)

You've no idea how much I have looked forward to eating this Passover meal with you before I enter my time of suffering. Matthew 16:18 (NLT)

Reflection: If you've ever been to Riverside during a weekend service then you've experienced the Lord's Supper or communion. We do it every single week. Not every church does (not that there's anything wrong with that ;o) Some churches celebrate communion once a month. Others once a quarter or 4 times a year. Some churches do it only once a year. Why? Well, Jesus never really said how often we should do it. He did say, whenever you do this, remember me.

We do it every week because it's our tradition. There are good things about doing it every week and there are drawbacks. One of the drawbacks is that it can become a ritual that we don't really think about while we are doing it. But one benefit is it gives us an opportunity every week to connect with Jesus and to connect with one another in a way we don't really find anyplace else. We'll talk more about the mystery of the Lord's Supper later in the week.

But did you know that the Last Supper (which is where Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper) took place during a Passover feast (are you completely confused now? I have the effect on people all the time... heck... I'm kind of confused right now myself ;o)?

It was his last day before He would be killed. He sat down with His followers and did something that they all would have done every year since they could remember. It was the biggest festival

for the Jewish people. There was a sort of program to follow that all of them would have had memorized and they all knew (at least they thought they knew) what to expect with this Passover feast that Jesus was hosting.

But they were blown away by what actually happened.

Jesus took a feast that they thought was only about looking back and turned it into a whole new feast that looks forward. He showed how He fulfilled EVERY PART of the Passover ritual in a way they never expected.

Jesus likes to do that. He likes to break into our ordinary days and wake us up and open our eyes to things we never dreamed we'd see. We'll look in detail at what Jesus did at the Last Passover feast in coming days, but for today ask Jesus to show you areas that you might feel like you completely understand when in fact, there's a whole other world of meaning and joy if we'd just open our eyes.

Prayer: Father, thank You for sending your Son to be the perfect Passover lamb that would take away the sins of the world. Thank You that You were willing to share Your Son with us. And I thank Jesus that He was willing to come. In His Name, amen.

Tuesday:

On the tenth day of this month each family must choose a lamb... for a sacrifice... This animal must be a one-year-old male... with no physical defects. Exodus 12:3-5 (NLT)

As he was coming close to Jerusalem, on the way down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of followers began joyfully shouting praise to God for all the miracles they had seen. They said, "God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! There is peace in heaven and glory to God!" Luke 19:37-38 (NLT)

Reflection: So when it comes to understanding how Jesus fulfilled the symbolism of the Passover and recognize what that means for me I think it's important to follow the Lamb. The lamb (I'll use a lower case "l" when I'm talking about the wooly quadruped that the Jews ate at their Passover meals and I'll use an upper case "L" when I'm talking about Jesus, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, ok?) was the star of every Passover celebration and it was incredibly important for the Jews to make sure and focus on the Lamb as they prepared to celebrate.

The first step of the Passover was to select a lamb. Each family was to choose a lamb without physical defects to be the star of their feast (the lamb didn't know that this "celebration" wasn't going to be such good news for him but that's the thing about most sacrifices, they don't know they're going to be sacrificed). If you had a small family you could go in with another family to share a lamb. This was an incredibly meaningful moment in Jewish families. Choosing a lamb was something that they did with care and honor. It was important to them. They didn't know why God asked them to do this every year (although that's probably unfair to say. They probably THOUGHT they knew why God had them do this every year... it was simply to remember which as it turns out wasn't the only or even the most important reason) but they knew it was important so they carried out the ritual with the utmost care.

On the 10th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar year the nation of Israel selected their lambs for the Passover. Do you know what happened on the 33 year of Jesus' life on the 10th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar year? The nation of Israel selected their Passover Lamb (upper case "L" in case you missed it).

We call it Palm Sunday now. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey as people sang and laid palm branches down for Him to ride over. And the song they sang was not just nice song with a catchy tune. It was what was called a "messianic song". A song that the Jews sang looking forward to their Messiah coming. When the people sang "God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! There is peace in heaven and glory to God!" they were shouting out their belief that Jesus was the Messiah. The Savior. The Lamb (although they wouldn't have really connected the Passover lamb with the Messiah... but God did and they'd see it later). And Jesus knew exactly what they were doing. So did the Pharisees. They told Jesus to ask the people to stop. Jesus said, "If they didn't sing then the rocks would cry out" (I'd like to see that... but I digress). On that day, the nation of Israel selected their symbolic Passover Lamb. It was a great day. It was a feel good day. But it wouldn't last. Tomorrow we'll talk more about the Passover but for today, ask yourself if you've ever really selected Jesus as your Lamb. Have you given Him the authority to lead you into the life He dreamed of when He created you? And if you have done that in the past... how's it going today?

Prayer: Father, today I select Jesus as my Lamb. As my Savior. As my Messiah. I don't always do a great job of following Him, in fact some times I really stink at it. But today I resolve to once again follow Him. In Jesus Name, amen.

Wednesday:

Take care of the animals until the fourteenth day of the month. On that day all the people of the community of Israel will kill them in the evening before dark. Exodus 12:6 (NCV)

By now it was noon, and darkness fell across the whole land for three hours, until three o'clock. The light from the sun was gone-and suddenly the thick veil hanging in the Temple split apart. Then Jesus shouted, "Father, I commit my spirit to you," and with those words he died. Luke 23:44-46 (NLT)

Reflection: Once a Jewish family had selected their lamb they brought it into their house to take good care of until the day of the feast. That's four days that this cute little wooly quadruped would have to worm his way into the hearts of the family. And lambs can do that. My mom grew up on a farm and said the animals that were the sweetest were the lambs. Her dad told her not to get attached because ultimately the day would always come when Larry the lamb was served at Sunday dinner.

I guarantee you the same thing happened in many Jewish homes. The lambs would become part of the family and then on the 14th... well, you know. It would be crushing to many children and probably more than a few adults. So why did God ask them to bring the lamb into their homes for four days? Maybe to demonstrate that freedom and redemption (which is what the lamb represented to the Jews) weren't cheap. They came at a price.

So after 4 days living with the family on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar year at 3 PM the high priest would blow the shofar (a rams horn) from the highest point of the Temple and every family in Jerusalem would know it was time to sacrifice the lamb they had chosen. Do you know what happened in the 33rd year of Jesus' life on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar year at exactly 3 PM?

By now it was noon, and darkness fell across the whole land for three hours, until three o'clock. The light from the sun was gone-and suddenly the thick veil hanging in the Temple split apart. Then Jesus shouted, "Father, I commit my spirit to you," and with those words he died. Luke 23:44-46 (NLT)

How did Luke know it was 3 PM when Jesus died? Because you could hear the shofar that the high priest blew from the highest point of the Temple for miles around Jerusalem. Jesus would have heard the shofar blow and He knew it was time.

Israel had sacrificed The Lamb. The Lamb that had been selected just 4 days ago as the people of Israel had cheered and sang and laughed was turned on faster than you can say mazel tov. The same crowd that welcomed Jesus as their Messiah on Palm Sunday chanted, "crucify him!" on Thursday.

And so Pilate crucified Jesus. And the Lamb that represented freedom and redemption was sacrificed.

But what did it mean? What else do we know about that act? Well, I'm glad you asked that question. Tomorrow we'll look closely at the Last Supper (Jesus' Passover with His friends that He celebrated on Wednesday night which was confusing for the disciples but not as confusing as what would happen during the feast) and how Jesus showed His friends that He was the perfect fulfillment of every part of the Passover. But for today just spend some time basking in just how valuable you are in the eyes of Jesus. He sacrificed Himself for you. He died so you could live. He decided He would rather go to Hell for you than spend eternity in Heaven without you. I hope you're feeling pretty good right now... that was what He was shooting for.

Prayer: Father, I don't know what to say. Thank You for Your sacrifice. Thank You for how much you care about me. Today I resolve to live my life in gratitude for that sacrifice. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday:

Roast the meat over a fire and eat it along with bitter salad greens and bread made without yeast. Exodus 12:8 (NLT)

While they were eating, Jesus took some bread and thanked God for it and broke it. Then he gave it to his followers and said, "Take this bread and eat it; this is my body." Matthew 26:26-28 (NLT)

Then Jesus took a cup and thanked God for it and gave it to the followers. He said, "Every one of you drink this. This is my blood which is the new agreement that God makes with his people. This blood is poured out for many to forgive their sins." Matthew 26:26-28 (NLT)

Reflection: Okay... are you ready? This is where things really get kind of freaky. What Jesus does at the Last Supper (which was a Passover feast) as He institutes the Lord's Supper (also called communion) is mind blowing... at least it is to me.

Now the Passover had a sort of order that was adhered to strictly. Everyone would have know what the order was and would have probably shifted into cruise control as the meal started because they all thought they knew what would be coming at each point throughout the evening.

But they were in for a surprise. The meal would begin the same way every other Passover feast had started. There would be 4 cups of wine on the table, each representing something different. The concept surrounding the 4 cups is found in Exodus chapter 6:

Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (Exodus 6:6-7 ESV)

Each cup represents a different promise that God makes. The first cup of wine (which began the Passover feast) was the cup of cup of sanctification (I will bring you out). Sanctification is the act of setting something apart for a special purpose. It is the same root word as holiness. Something that's holy isn't sacred just because of what it is... it's sacred because it has been set apart for a holy purpose and that's what God tells the Israelites He's doing with them... setting them apart for a specific purpose. That purpose was to be the People from whom the Messiah (who would save the entire world...not just Israel but they lost that concept somewhere along the way) would be born.

The second cup of wine was the cup of plagues (I will deliver you from slavery). God promised He would deliver the people of Israel from the slavery of the Egyptians. When they were ready to drink from this cup they would dip their finger in the wine and let 10 drops fall onto the table cloth to remind them of the plagues that God used to deliver Israel. Whenever the Jews later celebrated this feast they would remember the deliverance from Egypt and (at least for the Jews living under Roman dominance in the first century when Jesus lived) look forward to the deliverance that the Messiah would bring them. They thought it would be political and military deliverance but God had something MUCH bigger in mind.

The third cup of wine was the cup of redemption (I will redeem you with an outstretched arm) and it reminded the Jews of the Passover lamb. The lamb that was sacrificed on that fateful night in Egypt when the destroyer came upon Egypt and every first born in the nation died. Every first born EXCEPT those living in a house where the blood from a sacrificed lamb had been painted on the doorpost. At the houses that were protected by the blood of the lamb the destroyer "passed over" and did not harm the first born in that house. It's a brutal and violent part of the story and I don't have the time to deal with the emotions that this story brings up in many of us. If you struggle with this part of the story, first of all, join the club. And second of all talk to someone about it. I've been working through my own emotions for almost 50 years and while I've made some progress I can't say that I can alleviate all your concerns. I will say two things about this though: first, the plagues

(especially the 10th plague of the angel of death) will seem much more justified if you don't forget that this story started off with the Egyptians killing all the Israelite baby boys by tossing them in the Nile to drown and/or be eaten by crocodiles and second, everything God does in the Old Testament is to get human history to the cross event. Anything that stood in the way of that becoming a reality was dealt with swiftly and often times brutally (in our own eyes) but all of it was done so that Jesus could die for us. I wish I could give you more but I can't. It's a good thing God doesn't really need me to defend Him though so I'll move on.

The cup of redemption was an important reminder for the people of God. It reminded them that although God may seem to be unaware of our condition, He's not. His redemption will come at just the right time.

And then there was the fourth cup. The cup of completion or hope (I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God). This was the cup that reminded them that God has a plan for Israel. That He has called them to be His special people (not favorite... just set apart for a purpose) and that gave them hope.

So after the first cup and the appetizer the host of the meal (generally the patriarch of a family) would do something that the Jews do to this day but they don't know why they do it. The host takes three pieces of matzoh (unleavened) bread that are wrapped in a napkin. He pulls the middle piece out and breaks it in half. He puts half of it back and then hides (the word in Hebrew literally means "buries") the other half while everyone covers their eyes. Later the children will look for the hidden (buried) piece of bread. Then the host will hold up the 3 (now 2 1/2) pieces of bread and say, "this is the bread of OUR affliction". The bread reminded them of the suffering they went through in Egypt. EVERYONE IN THE ROOM EXPECTED JESUS TO DO THE SAME THING. Everyone expected Him to hold up the bread and say, "this is the bread of our affliction".

But He didn't.

Instead He said something quite a bit different:

While they were eating, Jesus took some bread and thanked God for it and broke it. Then he gave it to his followers and said, "Take this bread and eat it; this is my body."

Matthew 26:26-28 (NLT)

What'd He say?!?!?!? What's He talking about? I guarantee you that everyone in that room started looking at each other and wondering if they had heard right. What Jesus is saying is, this bread that used to remind you of the affliction of the slaves in Egypt... from now on when you do this remember My affliction. The suffering I am going to go through in my body for you. Then He goes on. He picks up where He left off and continues the feast. Everyone probably eased back into cruise control until he got to the 3rd cup. The cup of redemption. The cup that reminded them of lamb that brought about their ultimate freedom and redemption. What they expected Jesus to say when He lifted that cup was something like, "this cup reminds us of the Passover lamb that was sacrificed so we could be redeemed."

But Jesus didn't say that.

Instead this is what happened when Jesus got to the cup of redemption:

Then Jesus took a cup and thanked God for it and gave it to the followers. He said, "Every one of you drink this. This is my blood which is the new agreement that God makes with his people. This blood is poured out for many to forgive their sins." Matthew 26:26-28 (NLT)

What'd He say?!?!?!? What's He talking about?!?!?!? We don't get it. But they would get it. Later it would make perfect sense.

After this ordinarily the host would say a blessing and go to the 4th cup. The cup of completion or hope. Jesus never drank the fourth cup during His Last Supper. He told His friends He wouldn't drink that cup until He drank it again with them (and us by the way) in Heaven at the great supper of the Lamb.

But in the descriptions of Jesus' Last Supper, His Passover feast, there's something missing. Something really important. The main part of the Passover feast.

There's no mention of them ever eating the lamb. There's supposed to be a lamb on the table but we never read anything about any lamb on the table that night. Why not?

My guess? My guess is there was no lamb on the table that night because The Lamb was at that table that night. Jesus was the fulfillment of every part of the Passover. But there was a big difference between Jesus and the typical Passover lamb. The typical Passover lamb didn't choose to be sacrificed. The typical Passover lamb had no choice. Jesus did. He chose the cross. He chose the nails. He chose the crown of thorns. He would demonstrate just how far He would go to redeem His people the next day.

Prayer: Father, I am blown away at how amazing Your plan is. I am blown away at all the ways that Your Son fulfilled the Old Testament feasts, especially this Passover feast. Thank You for choosing to sacrifice Yourself for me. Give me the courage to live my life every day as a sort of thank You for that love and grace. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

"Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you enter the land I am giving you and you harvest its first crops, bring the priest a bundle of grain from the first cutting of your grain harvest. On the day after the Sabbath, the priest will lift it up before the Lord so it may be accepted on your behalf. Leviticus 23:10-11 (NIV)

But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day." Then they remembered that he had said this. Luke 24:1-8 (NLT)

Reflection: Jesus was in the tomb for three days (well... it wasn't a full 72 hours... he was put in the tomb on Friday evening and released early Sunday morning but the Jews didn't split hairs like we do).

I can sort of relate. When I was 18 I was stopped for a broken tail light and arrested because I had a bench warrant out for my arrest (I wasn't a hardened criminal... I had gotten stopped for a broken tail light I had on a car I had sold and hadn't bothered to get it taken care of... so yeah... I was stupid). The judge decided to teach me a lesson and sentenced me to three days in San Bernardino county jail (gulp!). I was a skinny (yes I was skinny back then) middle class white kid from the suburbs... I was terrified. Everyone I talked to in lockup (I was learning the lingo of prison) told me, "dude, you do NOT want to go there! I was 100% on board.

But I went there. Someone was watching over me though... I was put in a solitary cell so I was relatively safe. It ended up being quite the experience but I didn't really know what to expect and my expectations ended up being WAY worse than my actual experience. Here's where this gets kind of wild... I was sentenced to 3 days in county jail. I was put in on Friday night... and released on Sunday morning. In that way (and not to many other ways) I'm just like Jesus! But I digress...

We talked in great detail about Passover this week. But three days after Passover the Jews had another feast to celebrate, the feast of First Fruits. First Fruits was a feast where the Jews would bring the initial offering of the crops they had planted which weren't all ready for harvest but a little bit was. They would harvest a very small amount and bring it into their homes. Then very early on the morning of feast they would wake up and take the stocks of grain that they had harvested and dance and wave the grain over their heads thanking God not for the harvest they had reaped but for the harvest that these "First Fruits" promised. The First Fruits promised them that a greater harvest was to come.

Do you know what happened in the 33rd year of Jesus' life, 3 days after the Passover, early on the morning of the feast of First Fruits? Let's read it again:

But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day." Then they remembered that he had said this. Luke 24:1-8 (NLT)

While the Jewish nation awoke and celebrated the first fruits of the harvest that was to come in the fall, Jesus "awoke" and arose from the dead. Jesus was the First Fruit of the resurrection that we now know is coming... a greater harvest (not greater in the sense that we're better than Jesus... don't be ridiculous... but greater in the sense of sheer numbers) that one day when it's time Jesus will gather up.

And so now we wait. We do our part to increase the harvest while we wait for either our individual souls to be called home or for that day when all of us will be gathered up together.

Jesus has fulfilled every single Jewish feast except for one. The feast of the booths (feast of booths? What's the feast of booths? Sounds like a carnival or trade show...). The feast of booths is also called the feast of tabernacles or the feast of tents. It was a feast that reminded the Israelites of their time spent in the wilderness during which God actually dwelled among them. It was like the other feasts that God gave them that reminded them of something in the past and gave them something to look forward to in the future. The day when God would once again dwell among His people.

In Revelation the apostle John writes about that future event:

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them..." And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" Revelation 21:3-5 (NLT)

The feast of booths is celebrated by the Jews sometime in fall (it's always a different date in our calendars since our calendar and the Jewish calendar are different). If it is a feast that reminds us of when God dwelled among us and to focus our attention on the day that He will once again make his dwelling place with us then consider this: Jesus said that nobody knows the day or hour when He will return. But every other feast that Jesus fulfilled He fulfilled on the day of the feast. So while I won't make any bold predictions here today about when Jesus will return I will say this... If Jesus fulfilled every other feast on the day of that feast I wouldn't be surprised if He didn't fulfill this last one on the day that the Jews celebrate it (I wouldn't be surprised if He didn't either though... are you confused now? Yeah, me too).

The main thing I guess is to live our lives honoring the One who redeemed us and made a way for us to be with the Father once again. Now on Easter Sunday we celebrate not only Jesus' resurrection but the promise of our own as well. A promise that will come to pass on the last of festival days that Jesus will fulfill at some point in the future- the day that God will call all of His children home to live forever with Him.

How do we get there? Follow the Lamb. What do we do while we're waiting? Follow the Lamb. Basically the answer is always going to be the same- look to the Lamb.

Prayer: Father, thank You. I don't know what else to say. Thank You. In Jesus Name, amen.

Easter isn't the end of Jesus' story. Don't let it be the end of yours

try something different this weekend- go to church

Everyone has value, a purpose and a destiny. Come find yours...