CHRIST IN THE PASSOVER

Hi everyone! Shalom!

It is so wonderful to be here with you this morning / evening. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you all!

Some of you may have heard the name *Jews for Jesus*, and it raised a question in your mind. “How can this be?” *Jews for Jesus?* Sounds like a contradiction - vegetarians for meat! But you know that of course that Jesus himself was Jewish right? The disciples, Peter and John and James were all Jews. All the writers of the New Testament (with the possible exception of Luke, were all Jews. Back in the beginning believing in Jesus was a very Jewish thing to do, but the point is that in Messiah God broke down the middle wall that divided Jews from Gentiles and made us one together in the body of Christ. So we are one in Him.

**Family Passover Slide**

I grew up on a dairy farm just outside of Bulls in a family that understood very well. My Dad is Jewish so what I’m going to share with you this morning is something that I grew up celebrating with my family every year. And my Dad is actually here with us today, so make sure you take this opportunity to courner him after the service and ask him his story and how he and his family came to faith in Jesus.

I moved to Sydney to work with Jews for Jesus coming up four years ago and this is my first time traveling around New Zealand sharing in churches here! It’s wonderful to be in my home country with you all!

Because God broke down the dividing wall, you all now share with me a rich heritage, the heritage of the people of Israel and all that God did to reveal himself through the fathers and through the prophets. And through the festivals of Israel - this is *your* heritage in Messiah as well. And so we are going to look at one aspect of that (this morning/evening) in the story of Passover, which is the account of God’s deliverance of the Jewish people from bondage and slavery in Egypt thousands of years ago. For many of my Jewish people the festivals are like this - *they tried to kill us, we won, lets eat.*

**Feast of Redemption slide**

But you’re going to see that in God delivering Israel from Egypt, he actually wove into the very fabric of that story a picture of a far greater redemption of all the world from the Egypt of sin through our Passover Lamb who is Jesus the Messiah.

So travel back in time with me to that first Passover story which you will find in the book of Exodus, chapter 12. And we will be reading verses 5-8 and 11-15. Now if you remember at this time Israel was in bondage. We were enslaved in Egypt and God promised that he would redeem us. So he raised up Moses and sent him to Pharaoh to say *Let my people go.* But Pharaoh was not willing to listen so God had to persuade Pharaoh to listen. God can be persuasive when he wants to be. He persuaded Pharaoh to listen by sending a series of plagues on the land of Egypt. You remember the story? There were ten plagues in all. Now the Jewish people were living in a section of Egypt called Goshen and they were automatically exempt from the first nine of those ten plagues. For example, the Bible tells us when God smote the cattle of the Egyptians with the plague, the cattle of the Israelites was spared. When God struck Egypt with a plague of darkness there was light in Goshen where the Jewish people were living. But not with the tenth plague which was the worst, the death of the firstborn. In order that that plague should also not fall on the Jewish people in Egypt, God commanded them to take a lamb for each family. So let’s put those verses on the screen. Exodus 12. We’ll be reading through verses 5 - 8 and 11 - 15.

**Read verses**

*The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.*

*Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.*

*Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.*

*That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.*

*This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.*

*"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn-both men and animals-and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord.*

*The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.*

*This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast.*

*On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel.*

So that is the historical institution of Passover. We know then that the first Passover was celebrated on the night of the tenth plague way back in the land of Egypt. But as we just read, God commanded Israel to continue to celebrate Passover as a lasting ordnance, so throughout our history as we observe the Passover, there were various symbols and traditions added to that observance to remind us all of that first Passover back in the land of Egypt. So that by the time Jesus and his disciples were celebrating Passover all but two of the items you see on this table before you were incorporated into that observance. Now of course the most significant Passover that Jesus and his disciples observed was that one in the upper room in Jerusalem. The Last Supper was a Passover. So then how much more significant does this feast come to be for us who are followers of Jesus in light of all that he said and did on that night he was betrayed. And of course we are still celebrating Passover every year in Jewish homes all around the world.

**Leaven Slide**

There's a tremendous amount of preparation that goes into the celebration of the Passover. You might remember from the gospel accounts that Jesus even sent Peter and John ahead of him into the city of Jerusalem saying go prepare the Passover that we may eat. And this preparation involves many different things, but most significantly doing exactly what God commanded Israel to do way back in the land of Egypt. As we just read we were to cleanse our houses of all leaven. Anything with yeast in it had to be thrown out.

**Unleavened**

God commanded Israel to eat bread made without yeast for seven days. Passover marks the beginning of a seven-day holiday called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. During this time Jewish people eat unleavened bread called matzo.

So, why no leaven?   Well, our ancestors, in their haste to leave Egypt, had to take their bread with them while it was still flat. In ancient baking a small piece of fermented dough would be added to a fresh batch, causing it to rise and puff up. This is what causes the holes in loaves of bread, as well as that flavor known as “sourdough”. Some Biblical authors used leaven as a symbol for sin, and it’s easy to see why. Just like leaven— - a little bit of sin in our lives will puff us up with pride—and leave our souls sour and full of holes. And so at Passover, we remove all leaven from our homes as a symbol of removing sin from our lives.

The apostle Paul applies this very ceremony in 1 Corinthians 5:7, when he charges us to “get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch - as you really are. For Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed.”

Once cleansed of leaven the home is ready for the Passover Seder. *Seder* means “order” because the Passover celebration follows a specific order of service, which is recorded in this book called a Haggadah, which means, “The Telling.”  And today, we will engage in the Passover story through reading together excerpts from the Haggadah, which you can find in your brochure.

**Candles**

Passover begins with the woman of the house lighting the candles. She then recites this traditional Hebrew prayer.  I’ll say it in Hebrew and ask the women to read the prayer with me in English.  *Baruch atah Adonai elohenu melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotov v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel yom tov.*  Women, together: *“Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sanctifies us by His commandments and commands us to kindle the festival lights.”*

I love that the honor of kindling the light belongs to a woman, because the Messiah, the Light of the world, would be brought into the world through the seed of a woman. The prophet Isaiah foretold, “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and she shall call His name Immanuel,” which means, God with us...a light to light the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel.”

**Cups**

There are four acts in the drama of the Passover Seder, so we will fill our glass four times: first for the Kiddish Cup, or the Cup of Sanctification.  Then comes the Cup of Plagues.  The third cup, the Cup of Redemption, is the focal point of the entire ceremony.  Finally we come to the fourth cup, the Cup of Hallel, or the Cup of Praise.

The first cup is the cup of sanctification because with this cup we sanctify all that is to follow in the Passover. And there's a traditional Hebrew prayer that we say over the kiddush cup and certainly Jesus himself said that prayer in the upper room. *Baruch atah Adonai elohenu melech ha’olam, boray p’ri hagafen, amen.* Men, please read with me in English.  *“Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth fruit from the vine.  Amen.”*

And then our Lord said something directly related to the words of this hebrew prayer “And then Jesus said, ‘It is with great desire that I have desired to eat this passover with you but I tell you truly I will not partake of the fruit of the vine again until I drink it anew in the kingdom.” And with those words Jesus signaled to his disciples then and now that this Passover was unlike any other for this was to be fulfilled in the kingdom. And so everything is now blessed and sanctified.

**Matzo tosh**

At the Jewish table, we always follow the blessing for the fruit of the vine with another for the bread of the earth—but remember, tonight there is no leavened bread, only matzo. One of the items found on the Passover table is the matzo tosh which contains three layers of matzo.  The head of the household removes the middle layer and recites a blessing. *Baruch atah Adonai elohenu melech ha’olam, hamotzi lechem min ha-eretz, amen.*  Men, please read with me:  Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.  The matzo is broken in two. One half is wrapped in a white cloth and then hidden…buried!  Because it’s saved to be eaten later, this is called the afikomen, which is Greek for “that which comes later”. Later on, all the children search for it, and have to find it, for the story to continue to unfold. (We’ll come back to that later).

**Questions**

The seder has begun, and the youngest child comes forward to ask the meaning of Passover. The child chants the traditional four questions. If you would like to read along with me, you can find the questions in your brochure: *“Why is this night different from all other nights?  On all other nights we eat leavened or unleavened bread, why on this night do we eat only unleavened bread?”*

Those of us who know the story of Passover are obligated to respond. And so we say, “This is because of what the Lord did for me when He brought me out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; when He redeemed me with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. When He provided the sacrifice of the Passover lamb for our family.”

**Lamb**

My ancestors were instructed to take a spotless lamb, and to apply its blood to the doorposts of our homes.  Those who obeyed God’s command were spared the ravages of the tenth plague, the death of every first-born son in Egypt.  When the Lord saw the blood on our doors, death was forced to pass over.  That's where we get the name Passover—in Hebrew, Pesach. In the same way that my ancestors had to apply in faith the blood of the lamb to the doorposts of their homes, each one of us must apply in faith the blood of the Messiah to the doorposts of our hearts.

The child then asks the following three more questions. *“On all other nights we eat vegetables and herbs of all kinds; why on this night do we eat only bitter herbs? On all other nights we are not required to dip the herbs once; why on this night do we dip them twice? “On all other nights we eat sitting upright or reclining; why on this night do we recline?”*

Passover is more than a story; it's a reenactment. On the first Passover our ancestors ate their meal with their sandals on their feet and their staffs in their hands, ready to leave Egypt at a moment's notice.  But today we relax and recline on pillows.  You see, in ancient Middle Eastern societies only the free could recline at dinner, only the redeemed.

Every year each Jewish family recreates the Exodus experience. Every generation must taste for themselves the bitter oppression of slavery and must long to savor the sweetness of freedom.

**Seder plate**

This is a seder plate, (and you can see it pictured in your brochure) and a piece of food, symbolic of the experience of redemption is placed into each one of these compartments.

The first item is called *karpas*, or greens.  These greens represent life.  But, before we eat them we dip them into salt water, which represents the tears of life.  By dipping, we are reminded that a life without redemption is a life drowned in tears.

This is the *chazeret*, the root of the bitter herb.  An onion or a horseradish root is used.  This reminds us that the root of life is bitter, as it certainly was for our ancestors in Egypt.

This is *maror*, the bitter herb itself… freshly ground horseradish.  Now, we're supposed to eat a full teaspoon of horseradish.  Do you know what happens when you eat a full teaspoon of horseradish?  You cry. And so like the *chazeret*, the *maror* brings to our minds how sad life is without redemption.

By way of contrast, we have the *charoset*, which represents the mortar that our ancestors used when they had to make bricks for Pharaoh.  It's made of chopped apples, raisins, honey, nuts, and it tastes delicious.  You might be wondering why such a sweet mixture is used to symbolize a life of slavery.  The rabbis explain that even the most difficult circumstances in our lives are sweetened by the promise of future redemption.

The last two items on the plate were added to the Seder after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. This is the *chagigah*, a roasted egg representing the temple sacrifices. The *chagigah* is a token of our grief over the destruction of the temple.  During the Seder, it is sliced, given out, and then dipped in salt water, which represents what?  That's right--tears.

This last item is called the *z'roah*; it’s the shankbone of the lamb.  Passover is sometimes known as the Feast of the Passover Lamb.  The lambs that were eaten were the temple sacrifices.  But in 70 A.D., the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and since those days, no sacrifices have been made, and so, lamb is usually not served at Passover.   The *z'roah*, like the *chagigah*, is a symbol of sacrifices which are no longer offered.

Now the presence of the egg and the shank bone force us to ask an interesting question. With no temple, no altar, no sacrifice, how is it possible to atone for our sins?  The rabbis say that forgiveness from sin is now obtained through repentance, prayer and good deeds. But the Law of Moses states very clearly that atonement must be made through blood and our good deeds can never save us. In today’s seder, this question is left unanswered and unresolved.

**Cup of Plagues**

It's now time for the second cup, the Cup of Plagues.  In Jewish tradition, a full cup represents complete joy.  But in one sense our joy is not complete.  And so we dip into our cup and let ten drops fall onto our plates as we recite the ten plagues that were poured out upon the Egyptians.  We mourn for their loss and express sorrow over their destruction.  There is an important application for us in this cup. Pharaoh hardened his heart against God’s will, causing pain and death for those he loved. Living in a postmodern society, we often believe the lie that we can define our own truth and that our personal beliefs are exactly that—personal. But in reality, when we don’t obey God’s leading in our lives, the results can be devastating for everyone around us.

**Elijah**

After the second cup we come to the Passover meal. While the delicacies served will vary around the world, there is always a place setting left untouched for the Prophet Elijah. Why? Well, it is recorded by the Hebrew prophet, Malachi, that before the messiah comes, He will be preceded by the return of Elijah the prophet.  So, at Passover, a child goes to the door, and opens it wide, hoping that the prophet will accept the invitation, sit at our table, and announce the coming of the messiah.

(I distinctly remember the excitement I felt during this time when I was a child. *Oh my goodness, is Elijah going to be on the other side of the door! Is Elijah going to come and eat with us!)*

When Jesus spoke of his cousin John the Baptist, He said of him, “If you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come.” The forerunner, has come. And upon seeing Jesus the prophet John declared, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”  The question of atonement has been answered. Redemption from slavery to sin is possible, not through the blood of lambs, but through the blood of the Passover Lamb, the Messiah Yeshua. And as believers in Messiah,  this Passover story becomes our story. Because of the Lamb of God, we also pass over from death to life, from mourning to feasting!

**Afikoman**

After a delicious dinner, we come to the highpoint of the entire ceremony, the third cup, the cup of redemption.  However, we can't proceed just yet because something is missing.  Earlier, something was broken, buried, and now needs to be brought back - the afikomen.

All of the children search for it and once it is found, the afikomen is returned to the head of the house, who must ‘redeem’ or buy it back it from the child for a small price. (As a child, this was always a really fun part of Passover, and one year I was the one who found the afikomen. That was very exciting.)

So when the afikomen has been found, the head of the house breaks it. Each person receives a small piece, which is taken along with the third cup, The cup of Redemption. Does this look familiar? It should! This is the origin of our communion service.

The Rabbis taught that the afikomen serves as a symbolic reminder of the Passover lamb, which used to be the last thing eaten at the Passover meal. At the most famous Passover meal of all time, Jesus broke the unleavened bread and said “this is my body which is broken for you”.  And the matzo, which is unleavened, representing a sinless nature, can remind us of his body. There are very specific regulations set down by the rabbis concerning the preparation of matzo. Did you notice that it is striped?  Jesus was striped.  The prophet Isaiah foretold, “And with His stripes, we are healed.” The matzo is also pierced. (Hold in front of a candle to show the holes) Jesus was pierced.  God, speaking through the prophet Zechariah said, “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.”

I can see the gospel story suggested not only in the matzo, but also in the matzo tosh - the three-layered pouch from which the afikomen is drawn. There's quite a bit of disagreement among our rabbis about the meaning of this strange pouch, a mysterious three-in-one unit.

Some teach that the matzo tosh represents the three patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.  But then why is the middle matzo broken, buried, and then brought back?  Others say that the matzos represent the three divisions of worship in the ancient kingdom: the priests, the Levites, and the people of Israel.  But again, why is the middle matzo broken, buried, and then brought back?

In the Jewish community today the origin of this tradition has been lost. But there is another little-known explanation, which has first century roots.  There are three layers here, and yet they form a unity, a tri-unity. Jewish believers in Jesus realize that the unity of the matzo tosh can point us to the unity of one God revealed in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.  Why is the middle matzo broken, buried, and then brought back? I believe it’s because Jesus was broken, buried, and then brought back.

**Cup of Redemption**

It was speaking of the Cup of Redemption that our Messiah said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”  This is the very new covenant promised to us by God when He said through the prophet Jeremiah, “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah not like the covenant that I made with their fathers…I will put my law within them and on their hearts I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. For I will forgive their sin and remember their iniquity no more.”

This was the ultimate condition that the new covenant rested. No longer would there be daily offerings of animals in that temple, but once for all would God deal with this most difficult of human predicaments.

Jesus coming to the very highest point of the Passover Seder, in that upper room, having taken the bread, raises the cup up and says, “That which you’ve been waiting for, that which you’ve been promised, this new covenant now comes in my blood”

Imagine how the disciples must have felt after celebrating this Passover year after year after year and then one day in that upper room seeing its very fulfillment. To imagine that God, after delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt wove into that story this picture of the greatest redemption of all. And in that redemption you and I partake if we know Christ as our Saviour, if we have by faith applied the blood of his sacrifice to the doorpost of our hearts. You see, Jesus is OUR Passover lamb. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

The broken piece of afikomen and the Cup of Redemption are taken together in remembrance of the body and blood of the Passover lamb. My Passover lamb is Jesus.

The fourth and final cup is the cup is the cup of Hallel, the cup of praise. As we drink from this cup, we sing from what are known as the Hallel psalms, Psalms 113-118, and it may have been one of these Psalms that the disciples sang when we read in the Gospels that after dinner they sang a hymn and then went out into the garden.

**Ending**

Passover is a night of rejoicing, a night of thanksgiving, a night to praise God. Tonight, I can praise God not only because my ancestors were redeemed from bondage and slavery to Pharaoh, but because I too, through my faith in the Messiah Jesus, have also been redeemed from an even greater bondage to sin and death.

The Passover story isn’t quite over because our Jewish people are still waiting for the Messiah to come and gather his people in Jerusalem and celebrate Passover together. So, at the end of the Seder it’s customary to say, ‘Next year in Jerusalem!”  As believers in Jesus, we also wait for the return of our Messiah to establish His Kingdom in the NEW Jerusalem, so we can say “Next Year in the NEW Jerusalem!’

**J4J video -** We're now going to watch a short video about Jews for Jesus and the work they are doing worldwide.

**My update**

So as I already mentioned, I've been interning with Jews for Jesus in Sydney since July last year. In Sydney, we have a book and gift shop which is in Bondi Junction. In the shop we have a lot of Jewish gifts and every week Jewish people come in and we are able to talk to them. Some come in just to buy a menorah or to argue or just to say what is this place?! There is a big sign above the door that says Jews for Jesus so we get plenty of people wondering what we're all about.

Our goal with the shop is to create a comfortable place for people to consider Jesus. And it's amazing the opportunities we are able to have to explain why we believe Jesus is the Messiah.

**Books**

After the service I’m going to be at the back with some products to sell from our shop. Books, CDs, candles etc. Please come and have a look and I’d love to chat to you.

**Finish**

I’d like to finish by inviting you to partner with Jews for Jesus. And there are three ways you can do this. You’ll see on the back of your pamphlet, there is a form you can tear off, so if you’d like to do that now together with me.

And one way you can partner with us is by signing up to receive our newsletter. I have a few copies I have left at the back table so feel free to take them or have a look. It’s just our way of keeping in touch with you and sharing stories of what God is doing among the Jewish people around the world.

Another way you can join us in our mission is by giving financially to help us fund the work we are doing among the Jewish people

And the third way and definitely the most important is by praying for our ministry. Please pray for wisdom and guidance from God as we reach out to the Jewish people in this city with His love.