Passover – An Old Story Made New

1. It is the oldest continually celebrated tradition in the world. 3500 years ago, in a dark and distant time, in a place where hope had been lost and slaves huddled in fear…God broke in and brought safety and life. His Angel stalked the land, protecting His people and setting the stage for freedom. Their story was about to move in ways none of them could have ever anticipated.

2. The story is familiar to most of us who were raised in a church of one sort or another, but like all good stories, it needs to be reviewed and retold from time to time to set the stage for our own story. That's how stories work: we hear stories of brave people doing brave things to motivate us to be brave and do brave things. We need stories of how people gained freedom or lost freedom so that we know where we are in OUR story and can change the trajectory of our story in time to end up where we want to be.

3. Let's begin…

4. The Jews had gone to Egypt as honored guests, received by a grateful Pharaoh for the help Joseph gave the nation in preparing for a surviving the famine. A change of regime took place when invaders entered Egypt, overthrew the Pharaoh, and placed themselves on the throne. The Jews were suddenly seen as a danger to this new regime. Their living conditions worsened rapidly and sooner than they could have believed possible, they were enslaved and brutalized, made less than citizens -- less than people.

5. God's timing is not our timing – and never has been. When Moses was ready to act and lead a violent revolution against Pharaoh, God was not, and neither were the slaves (a history of failed slave revolts). Forty years later, 40yrs after Moses fled to the desert, found a new family, and had a settled place in that family and culture system, God was ready and called on Moses to return to Egypt and free His people.

6. Faced with Pharaoh's stubbornness, God unleashed a series of plagues on Egypt, striking down their gods and striking at the heart of their pride, willfulness, and national identity. God warned Moses that

the worst plague was about to come: the death of the firstborn. This would be a strike against the nation as a nation, their identity as a god-led people, and the whole man-god system that political leaders had set up to control the people.

7. God was about to unleash the Angel of Death into the streets of Egypt. The people of God, the Jews, would be safe from the Death Angel if they obeyed God and did exactly as they were told.

8. On the 10th day of the month, a young lamb without spot or blemish was to be selected and held until the 14th when it would be killed in the evening. Exodus 13:4-6 – this was to be a ceremony with a meaning that would be revealed in time…God's time.

9. As soon as the lamb was killed, its blood was to be sprinkled over the doorposts of their houses. The lamb was to be roasted and eaten hurriedly, with their shoes on, ready to move. (God's story has always been one of waiting…but being ready to move at a moment's notice: calling disciples, end of time, etc.).

10. That night, only those who had the lamb's blood on the doorways and who were ready to move would be left untouched. The Angel of Death would not enter their homes.

11. The next day was to be a feast day – a feast that would last 8 days.

12. The Passover was a sign of what would come later through Jesus. Jesus was called the Lamb. He, like the required lamb, was male, without blemish or spot, slain for us so that death would no longer be a fearful thing (the Angel of Death cannot touch us. Note the recent passing of one of OSHCs members in Mexico).

13. Just like the Passover lamb, no bone would be broken. The lamb was separated and chosen four days before it was killed. Jesus entered Jerusalem four days before he was taken and killed. (and 4 days gives you a chance to know the lamb before losing it)

14. Let's imagine a Passover and see how it is still celebrated 3500yrs after the first Passover. First: remember the rules in Exodus

13 – all yeast is to be removed from the house. There is a thorough housecleaning by the hostess and then a ceremonial search by the host. He uses a lighted candle, a wooden spoon, a feather and a napkin as he looks for specks or crumbs that might contain yeast.

15. The last crumbs of yeast – hidden for him by the hostess/wife – are wrapped in a napkin and burned. (The New Testament uses this imagery in 1st Cor. 5:7 when it tells us to search our lives and "purge out the old leaven.")

16. The hostess then lights the candles and chants a blessing: "Blessed are Thou. O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sanctifies us by Thy commandments and commands us to light the lights of Passover." The table is set. Some items and traditions are standard, set by God 3500 years ago. Other things have changed over the millennia.

17. Since the temple is gone, there is no longer a lamb. Instead, a single bone on a plate represents the lamb and the loss of the temple.

18. Bitter herbs are there to remind them of their captivity.

19. Sometime during the Babylonian captivity, it became traditional to place an egg, hard boiled and roasted brown, on a plate to represent life, hope and the future (boiled to keep it fresh and useful for days).

20. Everyone has a pillow on their chair to relax and enjoy the Passover. It is a symbol to remind them that they are now free from the bondage of Egypt and are able to live in comfort and peace. They can take their time to eat and talk.

21. The cup of wine will be refilled four times representing the four "I will" statements in Exodus 6:6:7.

22. There is a cloth with three sections in it. Matzo, or unleavened bread, is placed in each section. At sometime during the meal, the head of household opens the cloth, takes out the middle bread, breaks it in half. Half goes back into the cloth, the other half is placed

in yet another cloth. That piece is called “Afikomen” meaning “that which comes after. The children hide their eyes while the father hides that piece of bread.

23. The youngest person present is then to ask the four questions that are and have been asked every Passover since the first one.

- **a.** Why is this night different from every other night?
- **b.** Why on this night do we eat only unleavened bread?
- **c.** Why on this night do we eat the bitter herbs?
- **d.** Why do we dip the vegetable in salt water?

24. But now…no more tears. Good news is in the meal. We are on THIS side of the Red Sea. We have crossed the Red Sea and the Jordan safely and we will cross the next river safely as well (prayers for my father, grandfather and mother. One more river to cross).

25. Then…the children search for the hidden bread. Whoever finds it brings it back to the head of the table who then unwraps it, breaks it, and hands it out. It was at that point in the Passover meal that Jesus would have said: “Take and eat. This is my body which has been given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

26. [Set up Communion: read Psalm 114 and pray for the bread. Then, say “As we take the cup that represents deliverance, redemption, and adoption, Jesus says “Take and drink. This is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for you for the forgivenenss of your sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.” Then read Psalm 116:1-14, pray once again, take the cup.

27. And here, we take our leave…quietly. No closing song. No announcements. We ask God’s blessing as we sit on this Palm Sunday and learn from the Passover meal and the stories told for 3500 years. And we pray for Easter morning when death will be defeated and our Lord raised up and revealed to all as the Son of God.

28. Prayer.