

If you ever visit Russia and have the opportunity to travel around a bit, it won't take you long to discover there is a common feature in nearly every city and town. Every place has a World War II memorial... or as they call it, the Great Patriotic War. The United States was never in imminent danger of falling. But Russia was. From our country, over 400,000 lost their lives... until you consider the Soviet Union had over three times as many die in Leningrad alone during its 2 ½ year siege. All told, the Soviet Union lost around 25 million people in World War 2.

When the war was finally over, nearly every family in Russia had lost people they loved in that war. When 15% of the population dies, everyone hurts. But the Soviet Union was the victor. The people were finally delivered. The sacrifice of the millions was never to be forgotten. And so every city and town in Russia has a World War 2 memorial. The town of Iskitim, population 65,000 where we lived which was in the central part of Russia had a memorial in the central square listing every one of the thousands from Iskitim who died in the war. And to this day, May 9 the continues to be a national holiday celebrated on par with our Independence Day. But for them it's called, "Victory Day"... the day Nazi Germany officially capitulated to the Soviet Union.

A great day of deliverance such as this must be remembered.

"Why is this night different from every other night?" Jewish boys ask this question of their fathers every Passover. The Passover is a celebration that also marks a great day of deliverance. The Jewish people recount everything God had done for the Israelites in delivering them from the hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

We might also ask the question, "What makes this night so different?" Why gather here on a Thursday night in the middle of the week on a nice Spring evening when we could be doing other things? Because tonight we have gathered to begin **a three-day observance of our great deliverance**. We are here because we need to remember our need for deliverance, the price of deliverance, and the means God still uses to deliver us.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he was observing a 1500 year old Jewish observance of God's deliverance at the first Passover. Israel was in need of deliverance. 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.

On that first Passover night the Israelites sacrificed a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts. The lamb sacrificed and blood shed spared them from death and freed them from slavery. 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.

We are in need of deliverance as well, but our need is far greater. We are in bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil. 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. The Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, offers Himself up this night for you, and even prepares to suffer the pangs of hell itself. Tomorrow he will cry out, "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 servant. 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.

The sacrifice of 15% delivered Russia from being conquered by the Germans. Russia considers that a sacrifice that should always be remembered. Yet tonight we remember something far greater. The sacrifice of 1, our Lord Jesus Christ, means the deliverance of all. And not a deliverance from earthly oppressors, but deliverance from truly great enemies: 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.

To close, I'd like you to listen to Psalm 116... a Psalm praising God for his deliverance. As I read it, think about your great need of deliverance, and the sacrifice necessary to give it:

116 1 I love the Lord because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy.  
2 Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!  
3 Death wrapped its ropes around me; the terrors of the grave overtook me.  
I saw only trouble and sorrow.  
4 Then I called on the name of the Lord: "Please, Lord, save me!"  
5 How kind the Lord is! How good he is! So merciful, this God of ours!  
6 The Lord protects those of childlike faith; I was facing death, and he saved me.  
7 Let my soul be at rest again, for the Lord has been good to me.  
8 He has saved me from death, my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling.  
9 And so I walk in the Lord's presence as I live here on earth!  
10 I believed in you, so I said, "I am deeply troubled, Lord."  
11 In my anxiety I cried out to you, "These people are all liars!"  
12 What can I offer the Lord for all he has done for me?  
13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and praise the Lord's name for saving me.  
14 I will keep my promises to the Lord in the presence of all his people.  
15 The Lord cares deeply when his loved ones die.  
16 O Lord, I am your servant; yes, I am your servant, born into your household;  
you have freed me from my chains.  
17 I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord.  
18 I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people—  
19 in the house of the Lord in the heart of Jerusalem.  
Praise the Lord!