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EXPOSITORY SERMON

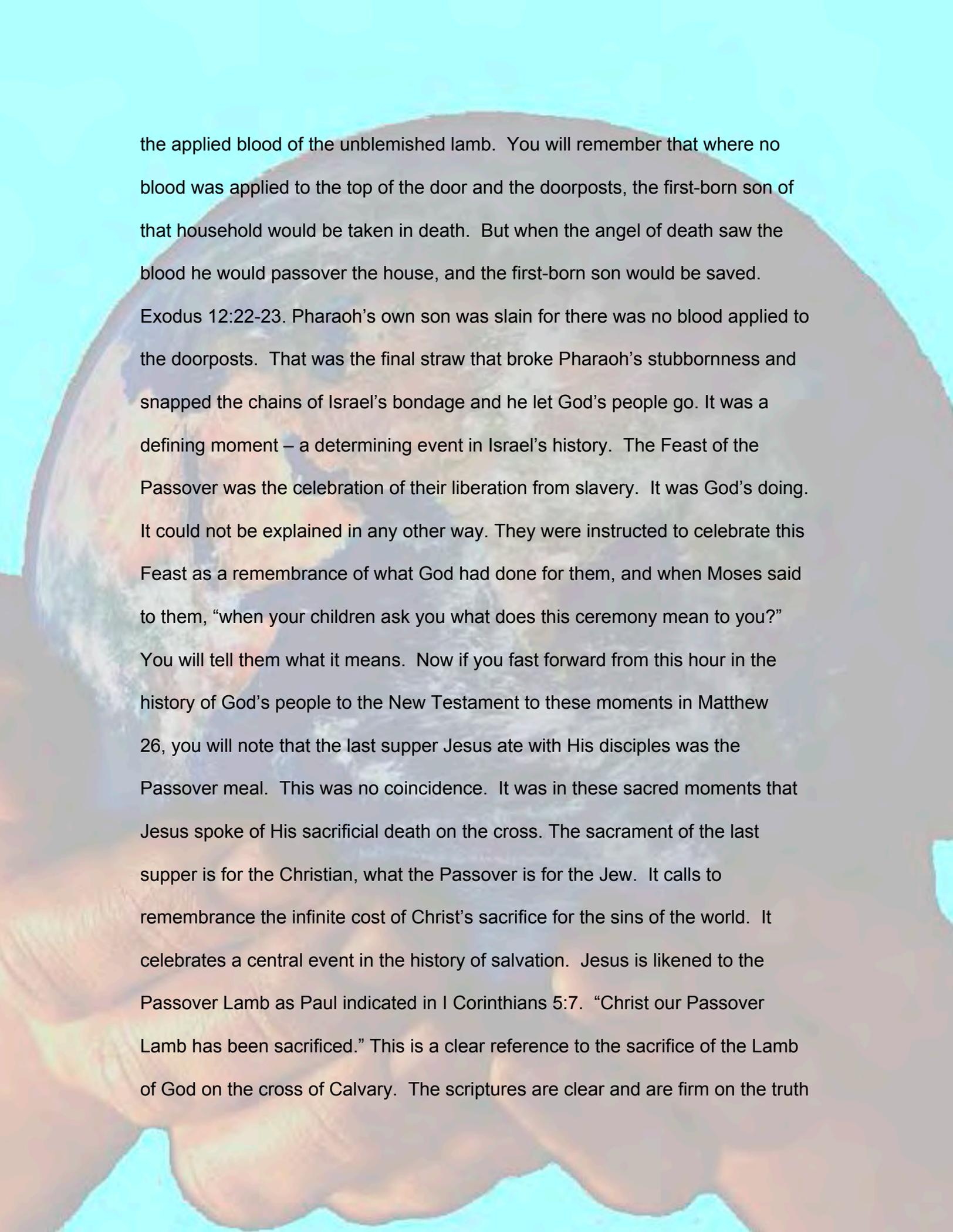
March 2013

“WHAT DOES THE CROSS MEAN TO YOU?”

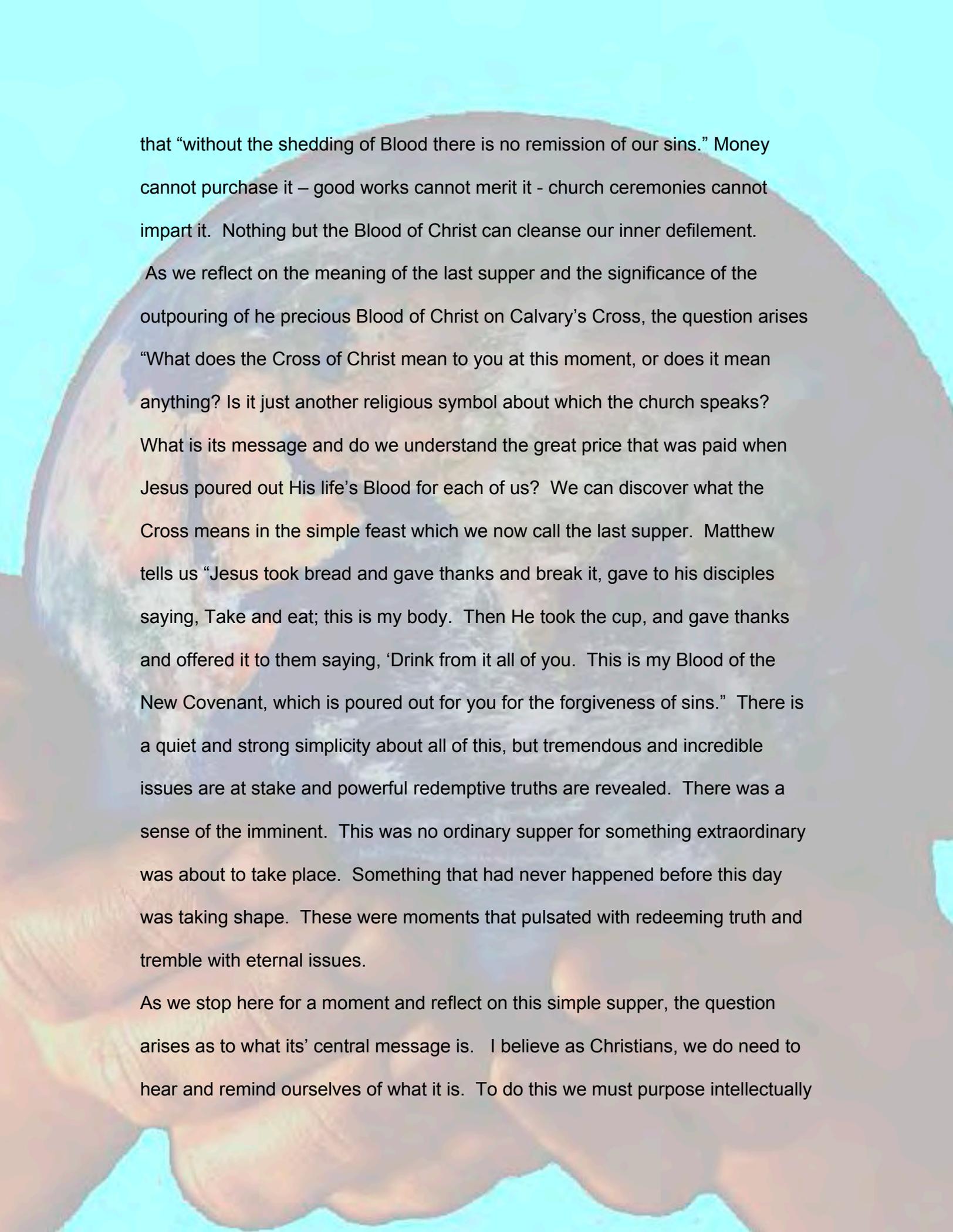
Scripture Reading – Exodus 12:26. Matthew 26:26-28.

Introduction

The passage of scripture that was read to you from Exodus describes the institution of the Feast of the Jewish Passover. It was a religious feast that became extremely significant in the life of the Children of Israel. It celebrated a historical moment when God had protected his people from the final plague of the passing of the angel of death over Egypt so long ago. It was this last plague that brought deliverance to the to God’s people from the captivity of the Egyptians. God gave clear instruction as to what each Israelite family had to do to escape the angel of death. Each household was to slaughter an unblemished lamb, take a bunch of hyssop dip it into the basin containing the blood of the slaughtered unblemished lamb and apply the blood on the top and both sides of the doorframes. No one was to go out of the house until morning. During the night the angel of death would passover Egypt and nothing could stop him except



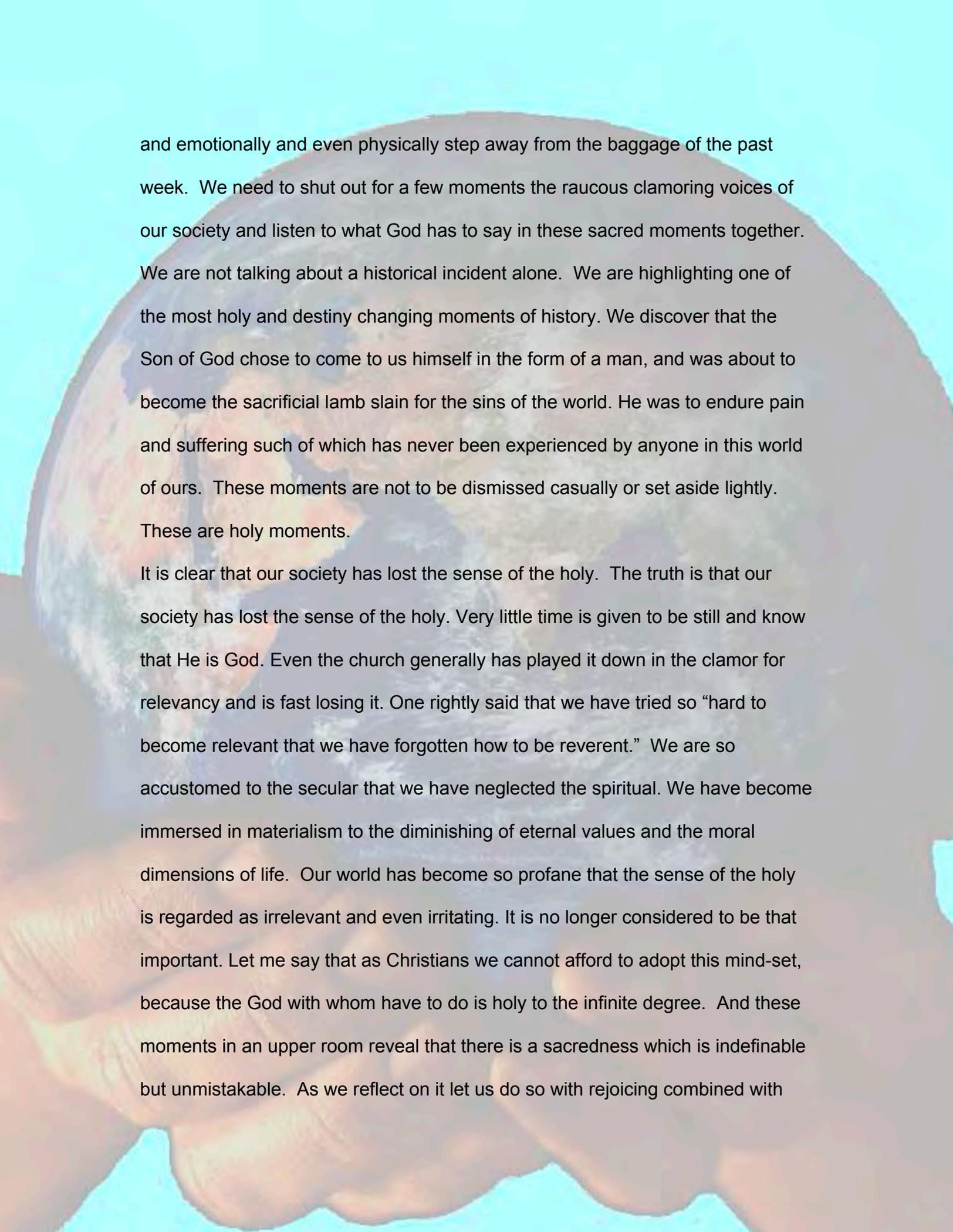
the applied blood of the unblemished lamb. You will remember that where no blood was applied to the top of the door and the doorposts, the first-born son of that household would be taken in death. But when the angel of death saw the blood he would passover the house, and the first-born son would be saved. Exodus 12:22-23. Pharaoh's own son was slain for there was no blood applied to the doorposts. That was the final straw that broke Pharaoh's stubbornness and snapped the chains of Israel's bondage and he let God's people go. It was a defining moment – a determining event in Israel's history. The Feast of the Passover was the celebration of their liberation from slavery. It was God's doing. It could not be explained in any other way. They were instructed to celebrate this Feast as a remembrance of what God had done for them, and when Moses said to them, "when your children ask you what does this ceremony mean to you?" You will tell them what it means. Now if you fast forward from this hour in the history of God's people to the New Testament to these moments in Matthew 26, you will note that the last supper Jesus ate with His disciples was the Passover meal. This was no coincidence. It was in these sacred moments that Jesus spoke of His sacrificial death on the cross. The sacrament of the last supper is for the Christian, what the Passover is for the Jew. It calls to remembrance the infinite cost of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the world. It celebrates a central event in the history of salvation. Jesus is likened to the Passover Lamb as Paul indicated in I Corinthians 5:7. "Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed." This is a clear reference to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross of Calvary. The scriptures are clear and are firm on the truth



that “without the shedding of Blood there is no remission of our sins.” Money cannot purchase it – good works cannot merit it - church ceremonies cannot impart it. Nothing but the Blood of Christ can cleanse our inner defilement.

As we reflect on the meaning of the last supper and the significance of the outpouring of the precious Blood of Christ on Calvary’s Cross, the question arises “What does the Cross of Christ mean to you at this moment, or does it mean anything? Is it just another religious symbol about which the church speaks? What is its message and do we understand the great price that was paid when Jesus poured out His life’s Blood for each of us? We can discover what the Cross means in the simple feast which we now call the last supper. Matthew tells us “Jesus took bread and gave thanks and break it, gave to his disciples saying, Take and eat; this is my body. Then He took the cup, and gave thanks and offered it to them saying, ‘Drink from it all of you. This is my Blood of the New Covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” There is a quiet and strong simplicity about all of this, but tremendous and incredible issues are at stake and powerful redemptive truths are revealed. There was a sense of the imminent. This was no ordinary supper for something extraordinary was about to take place. Something that had never happened before this day was taking shape. These were moments that pulsed with redeeming truth and tremble with eternal issues.

As we stop here for a moment and reflect on this simple supper, the question arises as to what its’ central message is. I believe as Christians, we do need to hear and remind ourselves of what it is. To do this we must purpose intellectually



and emotionally and even physically step away from the baggage of the past week. We need to shut out for a few moments the raucous clamoring voices of our society and listen to what God has to say in these sacred moments together. We are not talking about a historical incident alone. We are highlighting one of the most holy and destiny changing moments of history. We discover that the Son of God chose to come to us himself in the form of a man, and was about to become the sacrificial lamb slain for the sins of the world. He was to endure pain and suffering such of which has never been experienced by anyone in this world of ours. These moments are not to be dismissed casually or set aside lightly. These are holy moments.

It is clear that our society has lost the sense of the holy. The truth is that our society has lost the sense of the holy. Very little time is given to be still and know that He is God. Even the church generally has played it down in the clamor for relevancy and is fast losing it. One rightly said that we have tried so “hard to become relevant that we have forgotten how to be reverent.” We are so accustomed to the secular that we have neglected the spiritual. We have become immersed in materialism to the diminishing of eternal values and the moral dimensions of life. Our world has become so profane that the sense of the holy is regarded as irrelevant and even irritating. It is no longer considered to be that important. Let me say that as Christians we cannot afford to adopt this mind-set, because the God with whom we have to do is holy to the infinite degree. And these moments in an upper room reveal that there is a sacredness which is indefinable but unmistakable. As we reflect on it let us do so with rejoicing combined with

the attitude of deep reverence and gratitude for the sacrifice that Jesus made for us.

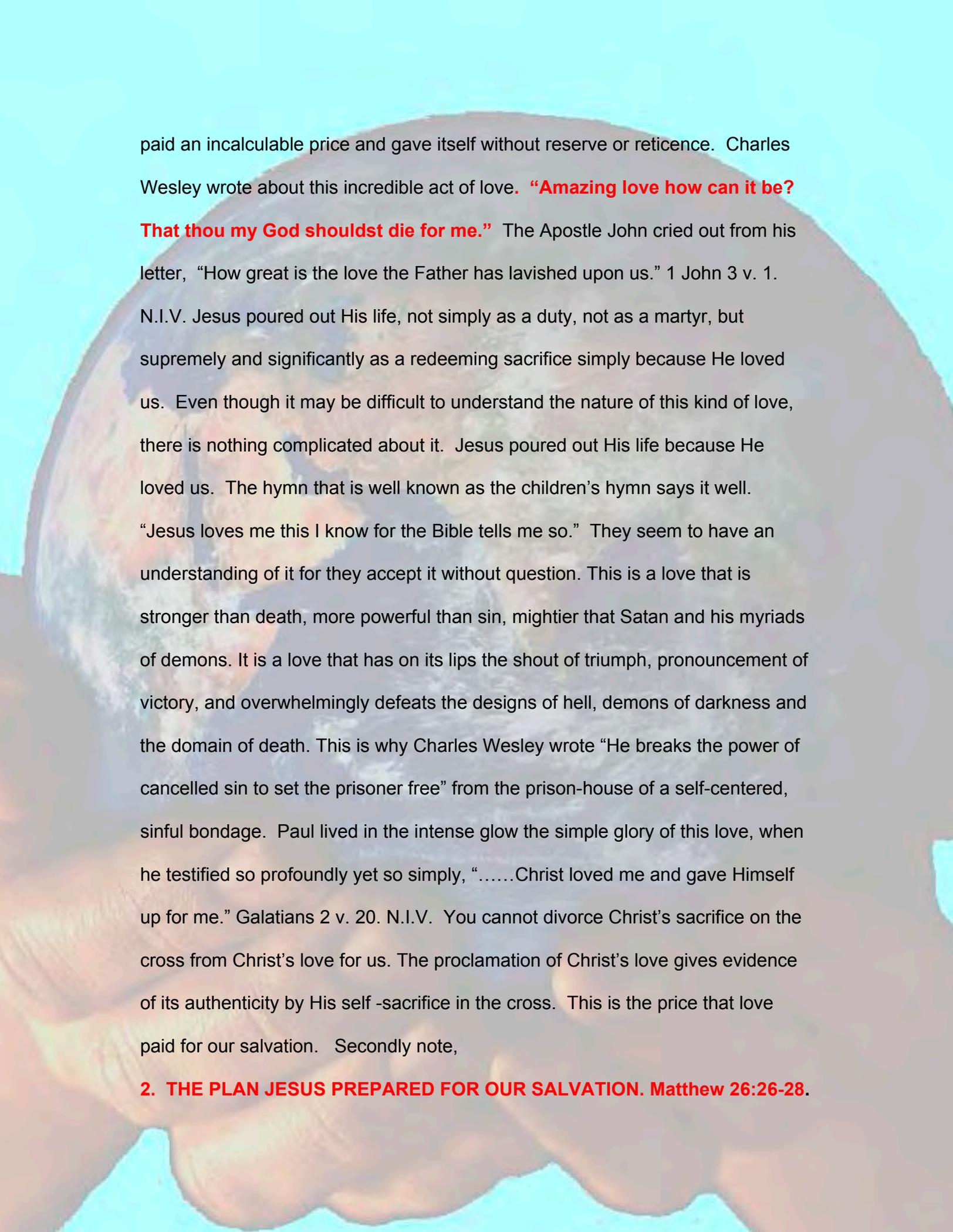
Now what does this incident tells us? First it describes

1. THE PRICE JESUS PAID FOR OUR SALVATION. Matthew 26:28.

Jesus said, “This is my blood which is poured out for you. The key words are, “My Blood.....is poured out for you.” As you look at the Cross once again you will realize that His self-giving was,

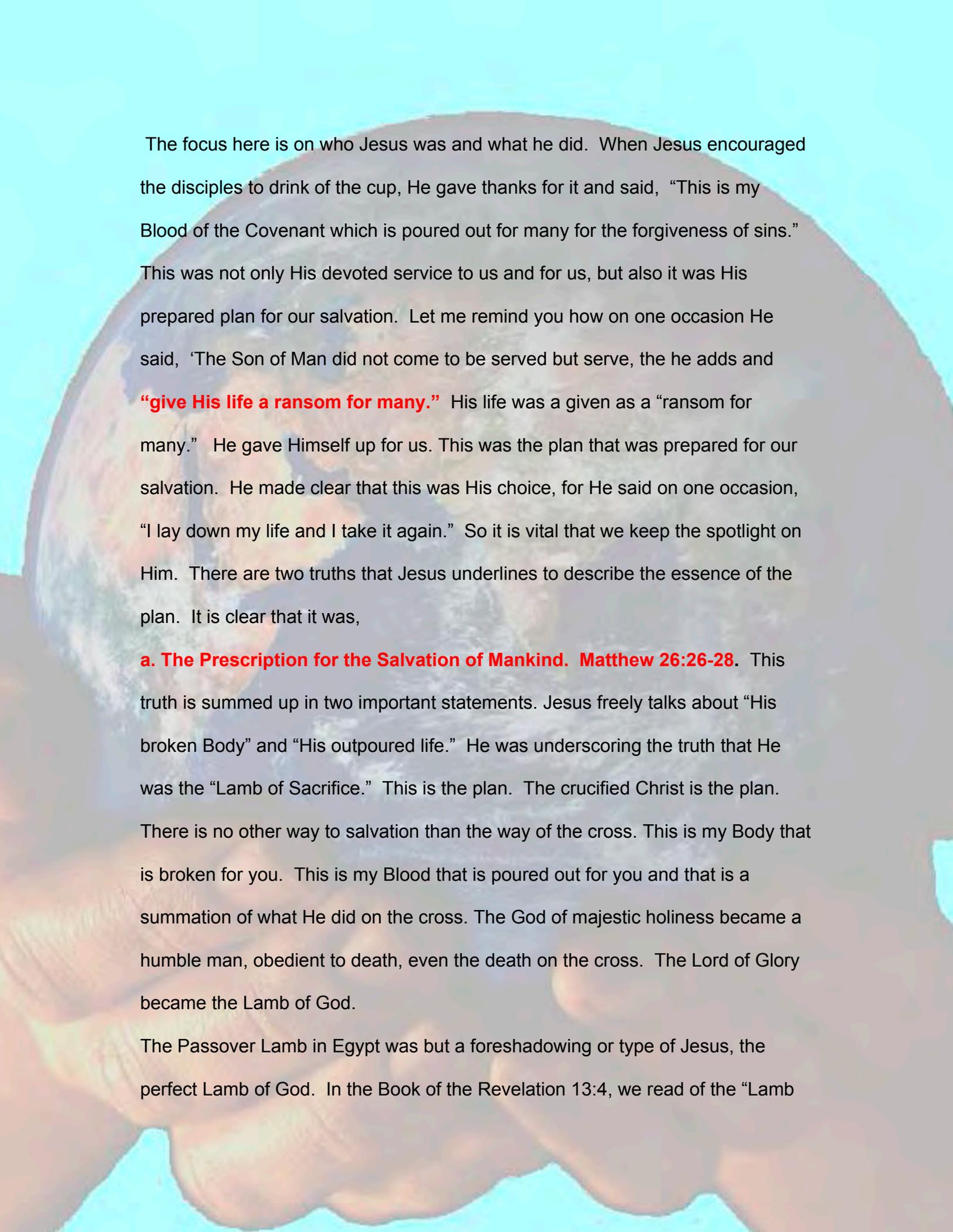
a. A Sacrificial Act. Matthew 26:28. Immediately you hear about the shed Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, you are underlining that His death was a sacrificial act. His words make this abundantly clear. His life was poured out for you. Stop here for a moment and reflect on that truth. Any serious reflection on this deed of God in Christ will bring about a sense of the incredible. **The Cross was not a grandstand play.** Here was no self-centered agenda. He was not a self-styled martyr. He did not have a selfish motive when He gave up His life on a Cross. **When Jesus went to the cross, He poured out His life’s Blood for you and me.** He said it Himself. “This is **My Blood poured out for you.**” He paid the supreme price for your salvation and my salvation. This was the highest act of sacrifice and the noblest expression of love.. His self-giving was a sacrificial act. Furthermore this self-giving was,

b. An Extravagant Act. Matthew 12:28. He said it clearly “My Blood....My Blood poured out for you.” My life given is for you. You cannot get any more extravagant than this. The pouring out of His love was an unsurpassed extravagant act of lavish love. A love that did not consider the infinite cost but



paid an incalculable price and gave itself without reserve or reticence. Charles Wesley wrote about this incredible act of love. **“Amazing love how can it be? That thou my God shouldst die for me.”** The Apostle John cried out from his letter, “How great is the love the Father has lavished upon us.” 1 John 3 v. 1. N.I.V. Jesus poured out His life, not simply as a duty, not as a martyr, but supremely and significantly as a redeeming sacrifice simply because He loved us. Even though it may be difficult to understand the nature of this kind of love, there is nothing complicated about it. Jesus poured out His life because He loved us. The hymn that is well known as the children’s hymn says it well. “Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.” They seem to have an understanding of it for they accept it without question. This is a love that is stronger than death, more powerful than sin, mightier than Satan and his myriads of demons. It is a love that has on its lips the shout of triumph, pronouncement of victory, and overwhelmingly defeats the designs of hell, demons of darkness and the domain of death. This is why Charles Wesley wrote “He breaks the power of cancelled sin to set the prisoner free” from the prison-house of a self-centered, sinful bondage. Paul lived in the intense glow the simple glory of this love, when he testified so profoundly yet so simply, “.....Christ loved me and gave Himself up for me.” Galatians 2 v. 20. N.I.V. You cannot divorce Christ’s sacrifice on the cross from Christ’s love for us. The proclamation of Christ’s love gives evidence of its authenticity by His self -sacrifice in the cross. This is the price that love paid for our salvation. Secondly note,

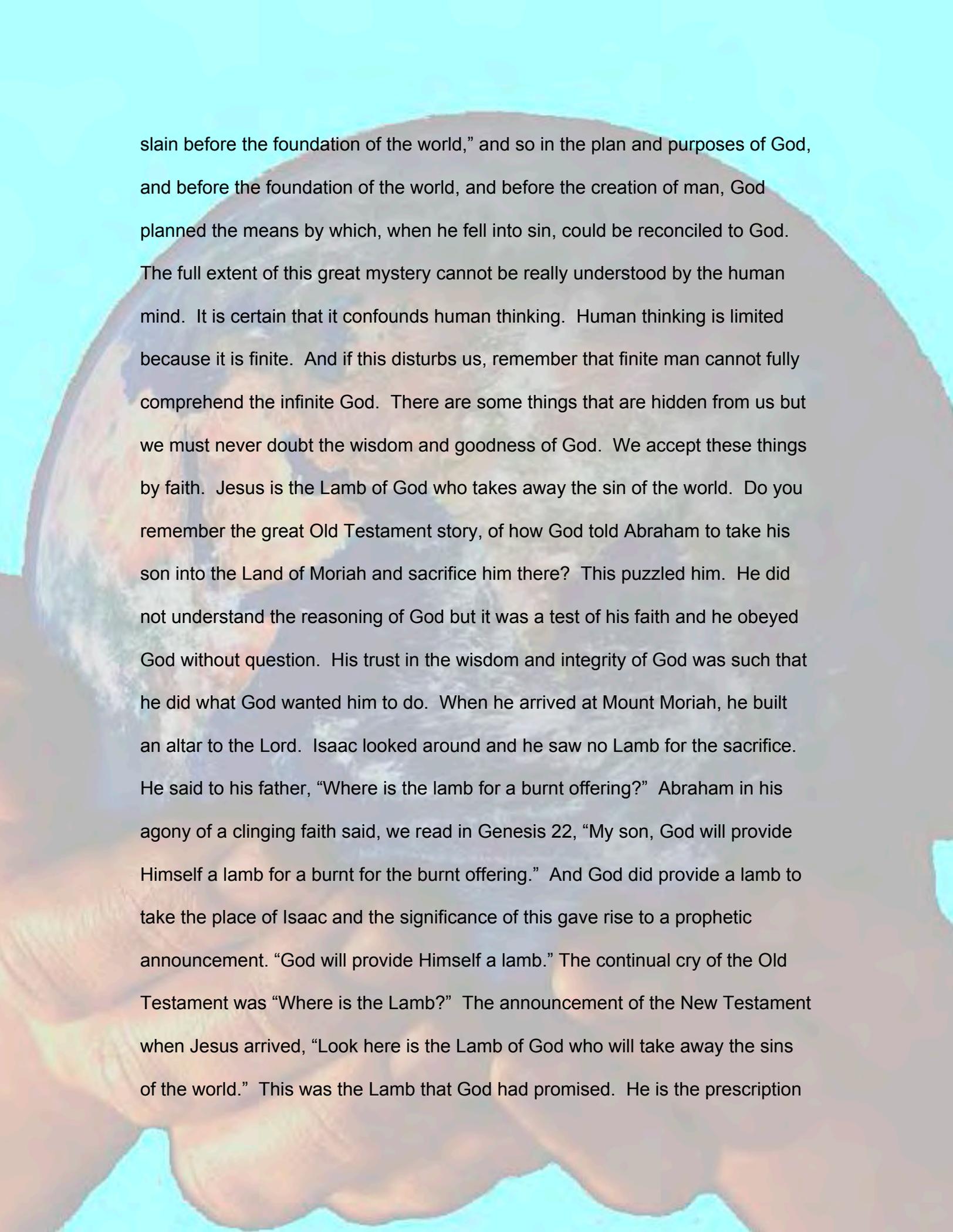
2. THE PLAN JESUS PREPARED FOR OUR SALVATION. Matthew 26:26-28.

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The focus here is on who Jesus was and what he did. When Jesus encouraged the disciples to drink of the cup, He gave thanks for it and said, “This is my Blood of the Covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” This was not only His devoted service to us and for us, but also it was His prepared plan for our salvation. Let me remind you how on one occasion He said, ‘The Son of Man did not come to be served but serve, the he adds and **“give His life a ransom for many.”** His life was a given as a “ransom for many.” He gave Himself up for us. This was the plan that was prepared for our salvation. He made clear that this was His choice, for He said on one occasion, “I lay down my life and I take it again.” So it is vital that we keep the spotlight on Him. There are two truths that Jesus underlines to describe the essence of the plan. It is clear that it was,

a. The Prescription for the Salvation of Mankind. Matthew 26:26-28. This truth is summed up in two important statements. Jesus freely talks about “His broken Body” and “His outpoured life.” He was underscoring the truth that He was the “Lamb of Sacrifice.” This is the plan. The crucified Christ is the plan. There is no other way to salvation than the way of the cross. This is my Body that is broken for you. This is my Blood that is poured out for you and that is a summation of what He did on the cross. The God of majestic holiness became a humble man, obedient to death, even the death on the cross. The Lord of Glory became the Lamb of God.

The Passover Lamb in Egypt was but a foreshadowing or type of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God. In the Book of the Revelation 13:4, we read of the “Lamb

The background of the page features a soft, artistic illustration of a human hand holding a globe of the Earth. The hand is rendered in a light, sketchy style, with the fingers gently cradling the globe. The globe shows the continents and oceans in muted colors. The overall aesthetic is clean and spiritual, complementing the text's theme of faith and divine mystery.

slain before the foundation of the world,” and so in the plan and purposes of God, and before the foundation of the world, and before the creation of man, God planned the means by which, when he fell into sin, could be reconciled to God. The full extent of this great mystery cannot be really understood by the human mind. It is certain that it confounds human thinking. Human thinking is limited because it is finite. And if this disturbs us, remember that finite man cannot fully comprehend the infinite God. There are some things that are hidden from us but we must never doubt the wisdom and goodness of God. We accept these things by faith. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Do you remember the great Old Testament story, of how God told Abraham to take his son into the Land of Moriah and sacrifice him there? This puzzled him. He did not understand the reasoning of God but it was a test of his faith and he obeyed God without question. His trust in the wisdom and integrity of God was such that he did what God wanted him to do. When he arrived at Mount Moriah, he built an altar to the Lord. Isaac looked around and he saw no Lamb for the sacrifice. He said to his father, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham in his agony of a clinging faith said, we read in Genesis 22, “My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt for the burnt offering.” And God did provide a lamb to take the place of Isaac and the significance of this gave rise to a prophetic announcement. “God will provide Himself a lamb.” The continual cry of the Old Testament was “Where is the Lamb?” The announcement of the New Testament when Jesus arrived, “Look here is the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world.” This was the Lamb that God had promised. He is the prescription

for our salvation. What was the

a. The Reason for the Sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Matthew 26:28. Why did the Son of God become the Lamb of God to die for us? Jesus made clear in Matthew 26:28. “This is the Blood of the Covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins” Why did He die on that **cross**? It is true that love motivated him to give Himself to the death of the cross. But what was the reason for His coming to this earth. It is summed up in one word. **SIN! Jesus knew the deadliness of it.** He knew its’ destructive power. He knew more than any of us, its damning consequences. That is why Jesus came to deal with it. A. W. Tozer wrote, **“The will of God is that sin should be removed not merely refined.”**

A No Trespassing sign seen in west Texas, with a rancher’s name signed in blood red, “What you should know is that if the Coyotes, Cactus, Mesquite, Heat, Dust or Rattlers don’t get you I will.” There is no way anyone could win in that situation. That is the state of men and women in sin. There is no way out by himself. God knows this to be true. He knows the deadliness of sin. Someone asked, “What is sin? Man calls it an accident, God calls it abomination. Man calls it a defect, God calls it a disease. Man calls it an error, God calls it enmity. Man calls it liberty, God calls it lawlessness. Man calls it a trifle, God calls it a tragedy. Man calls it a mistake, God calls it madness. Man calls it weakness, God calls it willfulness. Thomas Brooks said, “Sin is the only thing that God abhors. It brought Christ to a Cross, it damns souls, it shuts up heaven, it laid the foundation of hell. Sin is the common disease of the human race.” Let us make quite clear that Jesus came to this earth because of sin. When man

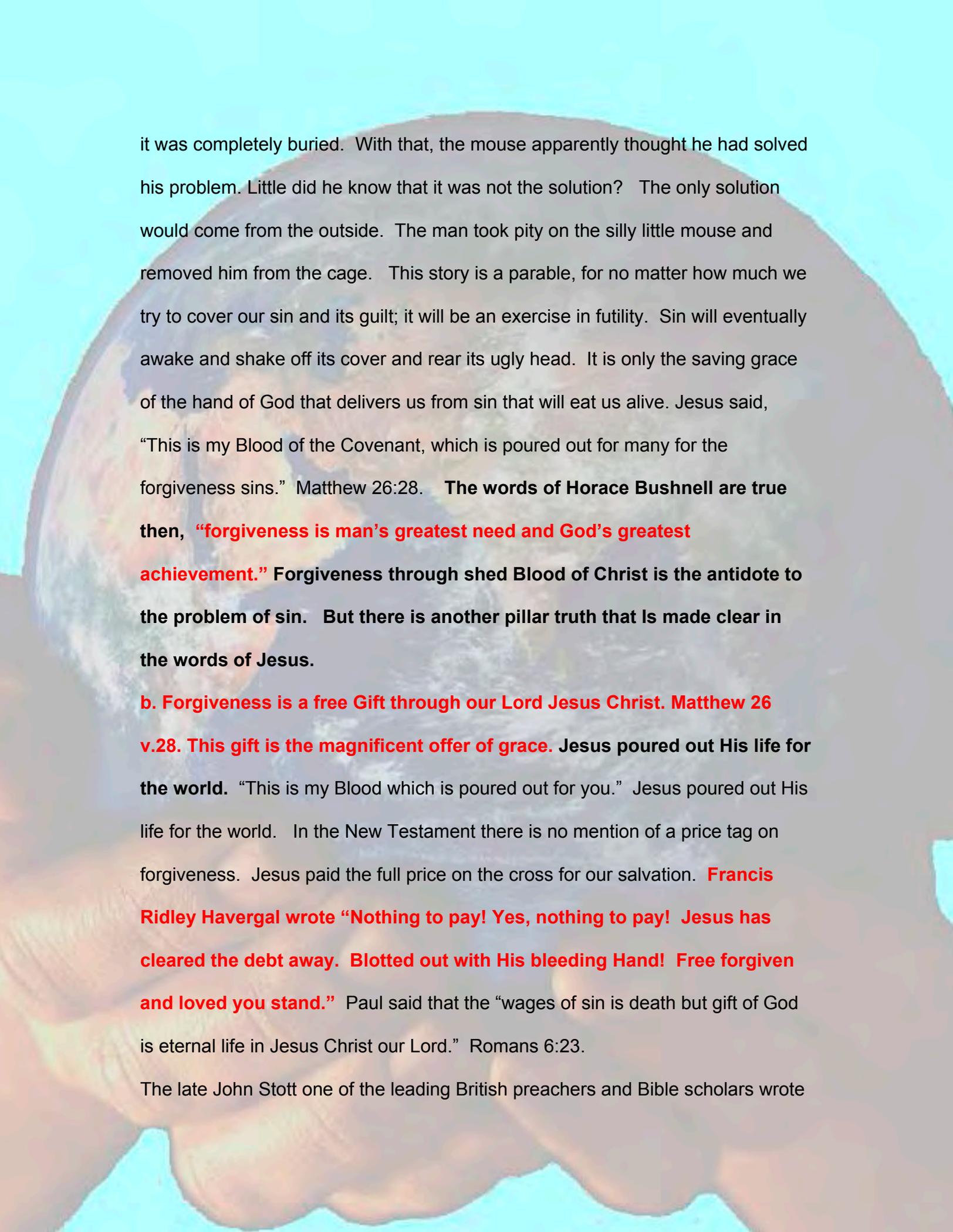
deliberately sinned against God, God immediately promised that He would make a way out of sin. So in these moments at the last supper we hear about,

3. THE PROVISION JESUS PROMISED FOR OUR SALVATION. Matthew

26:26-28. There are two truths that Jesus underscores as the focus and purpose of this provision. The first is a simple yet an indispensable pillar of truth in the gospel proclamation. I am sure you have heard it but it bears repeating.

a. Forgiveness is the Antidote to the Problem of a Sinful Past. Matthew

26:26-28. Jesus said that, “this is My Blood of the Covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins.” The provision of Christ on Mt Cavalry opened the door to forgiveness and cleansing from a sinful past. The cross is God’s interference in man’s movement towards a lost eternity. D. L. Moody maintained that, “looking at the wound of sin will never save anyone. What you must do is look at the remedy. The voice of sin maybe loud, but the voice of the forgiveness of God is louder.” Horace Bushnell wrote that, “Forgiveness is man’s greatest need and God’s highest achievement. Only God has the right to throw the first stone. But He doesn’t. He offers forgiveness. Man tries to hide their sins, but that is not the answer.” A man purchased a white mouse to use as food for his pet snake. He dropped the unsuspecting mouse into the snake’s glass cage, where the snake was sleeping in a bed of sawdust. The tiny mouse had a problem on his hands. At any moment he could be swallowed alive. Obviously, the mouse needed to come with a brilliant plan. And so what did the terrified creature do? He quickly set to work covering the snake with sawdust chips until



it was completely buried. With that, the mouse apparently thought he had solved his problem. Little did he know that it was not the solution? The only solution would come from the outside. The man took pity on the silly little mouse and removed him from the cage. This story is a parable, for no matter how much we try to cover our sin and its guilt; it will be an exercise in futility. Sin will eventually awake and shake off its cover and rear its ugly head. It is only the saving grace of the hand of God that delivers us from sin that will eat us alive. Jesus said, “This is my Blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness sins.” Matthew 26:28. **The words of Horace Bushnell are true then, “forgiveness is man’s greatest need and God’s greatest achievement.”** Forgiveness through shed Blood of Christ is the antidote to the problem of sin. But there is another pillar truth that is made clear in the words of Jesus.

b. Forgiveness is a free Gift through our Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 26 v.28. This gift is the magnificent offer of grace. Jesus poured out His life for the world. “This is my Blood which is poured out for you.” Jesus poured out His life for the world. In the New Testament there is no mention of a price tag on forgiveness. Jesus paid the full price on the cross for our salvation. **Francis Ridley Havergal wrote “Nothing to pay! Yes, nothing to pay! Jesus has cleared the debt away. Blotted out with His bleeding Hand! Free forgiven and loved you stand.”** Paul said that the “wages of sin is death but gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:23.

The late John Stott one of the leading British preachers and Bible scholars wrote

that not long before she died in 1988, in moment of surprising candor and honesty in television, Marghanita Laski, one of our best-known secular humanist and novelists, said. "What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me." How wrong she was, for she had not heard that Jesus poured out His life's Blood for the forgiveness of sins. Anyone can know God's forgiveness. It is a free gift through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

What does the Cross mean to you? In 1946, the government of the Polish Prime Minister Jaruzelski had ordered crucifixes removed from classroom walls, just as they had been banned in factories, hospitals and other public institutions. Catholic bishops attacked the ban that had stirred waves of anger and resentment all across Poland. Ultimately the government relented, insisting that the law remain on the books, but agreeing not to press for the removal of crucifixes, particularly in the classrooms. But one zealous Communist school administrator in Garwolin decided that the law was the law. So one evening he had seven large crucifixes removed from the lecture halls where they hung since the school's founding in the twenties. Days later, a group of parents entered the school and hung more crosses. The administrator promptly had these taken down as well. The next day two-thirds of the school's six hundred students staged a sit in. When heavily armed riot police arrived, the students were forced into the streets. Then they marched, crucifixes held high, to a nearby church where twenty-five hundred other students from nearby schools joined them for a morning prayer in support of the protest. Soldiers surrounded the church. But

the pictures from inside of students holding crosses high above their heads flashed around the world. So did the words of the priest who delivered the message to the weeping congregation that. "There is no Poland without the Cross. What this last supper says to us this morning is that, "there is no salvation without the Cross." Without the Christ of the Cross there is no forgiveness. At this Easter time let us determine hold high the Cross for it is the only way to salvation.

