

**Mark:
The Last Supper**

Mark 14:22-26

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Now tonight as we continue in the Gospel of Mark, we're in the fourteenth chapter. We are still in the upper room where Jesus and the disciples have just begun the preparation for the celebration of the Passover meal, and last week we were looking at the incident in which Jesus predicts that one of the disciples will betray Him.

Now tonight we come to the section that begins at verse 22 through to verse 25, the institution of the Lord's Supper. Before we read the passage, let's once again come before God and ask Him for His blessing.

Our Father in heaven, we are a poor and needy people. We are always hungry. You feed us, but quickly we feel the need for more food, the food of Your word. And we pray tonight again for the ministry of Your Spirit to illuminate our minds, to give us understanding, to help us plumb some of the depths of the riches of Your word. Feed us and give us that holy desire that in tasting Your word we might, as Jeremy was just reminding us, discover something sweeter than honey. Our Father, we cast ourselves upon You. Hear us, Lord, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

This is God's holy and inerrant word:

While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body." And when He had taken the cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Amen. And May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

We're all too familiar now with the question, "What does *is* mean?" Well, in the discussions on this passage that emerged down through the centuries, and particularly in the sixteenth century at the time of the Reformation, that was the question: What does *is mean*?

When Jesus said, "This *is* My body...this *is* My blood..." what did He mean, exactly? And of course, the medieval Catholic Church took it one way and Luther took it another way, and Zwingli took it another way, and Calvin took it another way, and on and on we could go.

Indeed, when the words of the institution of the bread words "this is My body" came to be rendered into Latin in the Latin Vulgate, the Bible of the medieval Catholic Church, it was rendered *Hoc est corpus meum* "This is My body." And it's from that expression, of course, that we get the phrase *hocus pocus* because something magical is supposed to be happening, according to some. You say some words of incantation over the host, and *hocus pocus!* it turns into the body and blood of Jesus.

It's Passover in Jerusalem, and we need to appreciate something of what that means and we need to appreciate something of what the celebration of the Passover meal means. Jesus has sent two of His disciples, Peter and John, into Jerusalem to meet a prearranged man who would be carrying a water pitcher, and to follow him to his home and there to make preparations in this upper room for the celebration of the Passover meal.

A lamb would have to be taken to the temple and there ritually slaughtered. And then that lamb, having been butchered and prepared, would be brought back and roasted for Passover. It was a meal. It was a good meal. It could be a substantial meal. It began with a cup of wine. There would be four cups of wine (if you're worried, it was probably watered down, but let's pass all that by now). It began with a cup of wine, the first of four. And then there would be hors d'oeuvres, green herbs and *Haroseth* sauce, which was a kind of fruit-base in a kind of vinegar.

Then would occur the so-called *Haggadah*, where the boy would ask the father, "What does this mean?" and he would recite the story from Deuteronomy 6:5 and following; and he would say, "A wandering Aramean was my father..." and a kind of sermon would follow.

And then they would begin to sing the *Hallel* psalms, Psalm 113-118. And they'd sing a couple of them at that point, 113 and 114. And then would come the main Passover meal, and before that meal a ritual with unleavened bread. It would normally be eaten in silence. All the leaven in the house of course has been removed, ceremonially removed the day before, and it would normally be eaten in silence; but it's at this point that Jesus interjects a word: "This is My body, broken for you, given for you."

Then would come the main course: roast lamb and ...not mint sauce, but a kind of fruit puree, and a second cup of wine. And then some time later a third cup of wine — this was the cup of blessing. This was the cup that Jesus will take and He will pronounce the cup words: “This is My blood of the covenant, shed for many for the remission of sins.” And then they would sing the rest of those *Hallel* psalms from 115 through to 118, and then normally would come the fourth cup.

Jesus does three new things. He breaks the pattern of the Passover meal, and at the point of the eating of the unleavened bread He interjects this word: “This is My body...this is My body.” And the point of the cup of blessing (the third cup), He interjects another statement. It would have come, I think, as a total surprise to the disciples: “This is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many.”

Three Old Testament passages are probably in view, one coming from Exodus 24:8, where in the ritual of the ratification of a covenant, Moses, having sacrificed young bulls and after reading from the book of the covenant in the presence of the people, sprinkled the blood of the covenant in the presence of the people. And Jesus, I think, is alluding to that here: that a covenant is being ratified by the shedding of blood. This is a covenant ratification ritual.

And then another passage: there's a reference to “shed for many” — shed for many, and it's probably a reference to the fourth Servant Song in Isaiah 53:12, “...poured out for many.” But in the Lord's Supper the covenant ratification is a ritual that is going to be performed on behalf of many — God's people. A vicarious death, a substitutionary death, as that Servant Song would bring to mind.

And then, another text from Jeremiah 31:31, the promise of the new covenant; and when Jesus says, “This is the blood of the covenant...a new covenant”, a new covenant that Jeremiah had promised would be the hallmark of the age in which Messiah lives and breathes.

And then after that third cup, normally a fourth cup, but not this time. And Jesus says, “Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until the day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” What is Jesus saying here? He's saying three things.

I. This supper speaks of covenant.

He's saying first of all that this supper speaks of covenant. It speaks of covenant. Now, what do I mean by that? It is a meal that is eaten to remind them...the Passover meal was eaten to remind them of a very specific event: of the time when God delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt, the time when lambs were slain and blood was sprinkled on the lintels of the doorposts of the homes of the

Jewish people, the slaves in Egypt. And when the avenging angel came, he passed over those homes where the sign of the blood was in evidence. "And they left in haste..." - hence the unleavened bread that is associated with Passover.

Passover was a time to commemorate a very specific event, a time when the lamb was slain in place of and instead of the people of God. And only where the blood of that lamb was in evidence was the curse removed and blessing given.

Now when Paul comes to speak of the work of Christ, he tells us in I Corinthians 5 "Christ is our Passover...Christ is our Passover." And Paul is saying the whole of Passover, the whole of that ritual, the whole business of slaying lambs and of putting blood on the lintels of the doorposts, and the angel of wrath, the angel of vengeance, passing over and giving blessing and releasing the people of God from their bondage and their captivity — all of that, Paul says, speaks of Jesus. It points to Jesus Christ. It points to the coming of the Lamb of God. That's why it's so significant that John the Baptist says in the waters of the River Jordan, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." He's the Passover Lamb that was slain. Through faith in Jesus Christ, He becomes our substitute. He becomes our sin-bearer. He takes the curse upon Himself, and we receive the blessing.

Eating the Passover lamb meant fellowship: fellowship in the blessing of the lamb's death, participation in the benefits of the lamb's death, protection from the curse of God's judgment expressed in that work of the angel of death. It meant that the people of God were bound together under the shadow of that blood of the lamb. And the bread and wine now symbolize the signs and the seals of the covenant of grace: not circumcision and Passover, but baptism and the Lord's Supper — bloodless signs and seals, because the blood has been shed now, and

"All the blood on Jewish altars slain" had pointed forward to the coming of the Lamb of God who takes away our sin. And we have no need of bloody rituals anymore, but symbols of everyday and common life (at least in Palestine) of bread and wine and water, symbolizing and ratifying a covenant that God has made, a promise that God has made of a curse borne on our behalf and blessings instead.

No curse for us tonight who trust in Jesus Christ, no threatenings of Sinai that can plunge us into the darkness of hell tonight, because Jesus has died.

"There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin.
He only could unlock the gates of heaven and let us in."

In this upper room, through this symbolic ritual Jesus is saying to His disciples 'I ratify a new covenant with you now, a covenant that is signed and sealed in My blood.' Jesus is about to give His life as a ransom for many, and the judgment

and the curse of a broken covenant He will take upon Himself. He will take that cup of judgment that the cup of blessing, that third cup, might be given to us.

In the Garden of Gethsemane He will say, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup...” — this cup of judgment, this cup of wrath, this cup that represents the holiness of God against sin — “...let it pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thy will be done.” He drank of that cup that we might not have to drink of that cup; so that instead, we have the cup of blessing, the cup of covenant love, the cup of covenant faithfulness, the cup that says ‘Your sins are forgiven you’, the cup that says ‘You are now a child of God’, a cup that says ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’, a cup that says ‘Having begun a good work, I will complete it unto the day of Jesus Christ.’ But not for Him. He opens the door now in that upper room that leads into the darkness of Gethsemane and the horror of the cross —

“Stricken, smitten, and afflicted;
See Him dying on the tree.
T’is the Christ by man rejected;
Yes, my soul, t’is He, t’is He.”

Later, on that Road to Emmaus...and when He gets to Emmaus, He will reveal Himself to two disciples. And you know the moment they will recognize Him? In the breaking of bread...that He is risen on the other side of the darkness of that cup that He has drunk from.

You see, in the Lord's Supper a fundamental covenant dynamic is taking place. He is bearing the curse of a broken covenant, that you and I may by faith in Him receive the blessings of that covenant. This is a meal that speaks of covenant, of curses borne and blessings promised; a covenant that is forever, a covenant that cannot be broken, that cannot be annulled, that cannot be undone. There is no divorce from this covenant because it is signed and sealed in the blood of Jesus Christ. It's a meal that speaks of covenant.

II. In the second place, it speaks of communion.

It speaks of fellowship. It speaks of participation. It speaks of union and communion with Jesus Christ. When Paul comes to reflect on this in I Corinthians 10, he says, “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing [a fellowship, a communion] in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing [a fellowship, a communion] in the body of Christ?” Now, what does Paul mean?

We don't commune with inanimate objects; you don't commune with a piece of bread — they'd lock you up if you tried to commune with a piece of bread. You don't commune with inanimate objects; you commune with a living person. And the communion of which the bread and wine are mere symbols is with Jesus Himself. “Do this in remembrance of Me,” Luke will add to what we have here in

Mark.

It was also, of course, part of the ritual of Passover that they were to remember; that they were to specifically rehearse the story of God's redemptive purposes, of the deliverance of His people out of Egypt and out of bondage. It's not *remember* like perhaps we do at a funeral service — we bring to mind various memories, and perhaps we even bring a photograph to look at. It's more than that. It's *communion* in the sense that this bread which we eat and ingest, this wine which we sip and swallow and take into ourselves, it represents our fellowship and communion with Jesus. We feed upon Him, we draw our nourishment from Him, we draw our strength and vitality from Him. We are in union with Christ.

“For we do not have an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are.”

When God sent His Son, He sent Him in flesh and blood. He didn't send an angel. He didn't send an apparition. He sent Someone like you and me, in flesh and blood, and we commune with a Christ who is still flesh and blood and seated at the right hand of God the Father - the humanity and the divinity in hyperstatic union at the right hand of God.

We're not communing with the bread; we're not communing with the wine. We're not having some warm, fuzzy thoughts about this piece of bread or this juice that we're swallowing.

When Calvin came to write a liturgy for the Lord's Supper, he introduced something that had been in the church for a thousand years, called the *Sursum corda*, which in Latin means “Lift up your hearts.” In other words, he introduces that right at the point of the celebration of the Lord's Supper because at the Supper what are we to do? We're to lift up our hearts to commune with Christ symbolized in the bread and wine, but a Christ who is now sitting at God's right hand in glory. It's not so much as we often tend to think of Jesus' coming down here; it's the idea of us being lifted up into God's presence where Jesus is, to commune with Him, to fellowship with Him.

It is with Jesus that we commune. This is My body. This is My blood, and it speaks of Me, Jesus says. You're to think about Me, Jesus is saying. You're to fill your minds and your hearts with Jesus, and that's the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in the Lord's Supper, enabling us by His power and energy to feed upon Christ and to recall that in glory we have One who knows our frame — that we are dust; that through the trials and difficulties and vicissitudes of this life we have One who has been there before us, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

They ate, these disciples...they ate this Passover meal in the presence of Jesus. And they didn't think as they ate that unleavened bread and as they drank from

that third cup that something mysterious and *hocus pocus* was taking place with the elements of the bread and wine. No, it was to Jesus that they pointed, and it was to Jesus that Jesus Himself called them to meditate upon. It speaks of communion. It speaks of fellowship, it speaks of participation. It speaks of union with Jesus Christ: that when Jesus died, we died. And when Jesus rose from the dead, we rose from the dead; so that we can say with the Apostle Paul that we sit — where? — in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. In heavenly places in Christ Jesus! And that's the glory of it and that's the beauty of it - that we have a triumphant Lord who has conquered death and the grave and hell, and ever lives to make intercession for us.

III. It speaks of consummation.

It speaks of covenant, and it speaks of communion, and it speaks in the third place of consummation. Jesus says something quite extraordinary at the point where they would normally have drunk from the fourth cup. And He says, "I'm not going to drink of this cup. Not until I drink it new in the kingdom of God." "I will not drink of this cup" because if I drink of this cup it says it's all over, it's all finished now. And there is a sense in which it's not over.

Yes, the mighty, decisive battle was won at Calvary, but you and I live in a period between the ascension of Jesus and the Second Coming of Jesus, and though the decisive blow has been rendered to Satan so that at one point the disciples even blurted out "We saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" — but it's not over yet. And like Hitler in the bunker even after the decisive battle of D-Day, Satan still thrashes about seeking whom he may devour.

We're pilgrims, you and I, on a journey — a journey to the Celestial City, a journey to the new Jerusalem, a journey towards the new heavens and the new earth; and along that journey you have to stop every now and then for a little food. That's what the Lord's Supper is. It's like stopping every now and then for a little sustenance on our journey that will take us to glory.

Some of you may be near glory, and there is a sense in which for every single one of us in Jesus Christ, that is a glorious and wonderful thought: "...to be with Him, which is far better." But in this world there are trials and there are persecutions, and there are problems in this ravaged, sin-torn environment in which we live facing all of the consequences of the fall. This isn't heaven. Not by a long, long way. And Jesus is saying 'Rest a while on this journey, and take a little bit of food — food that will remind you of who I am and what I've done, and what I will yet do for you, My children.'

Like baptism — you "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the name of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and, lo," Jesus says, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." And just as in baptism

there is that picture of a journey that goes to the end of the age, so in the Lord's Supper you "do this till I come," Jesus says. 'Till I come. And then, then I'll drink that fourth cup. Then there will be celebration. Then there will be the marriage supper of the Lamb. Then I'll stand before My Father and say, 'Behold, I and the children that You have given to Me.'

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth its successive journeys run.
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more."

Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are reminded we're not home yet. We're not home yet, but home is a certainty.

"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

And there's one overwhelming response that I think we're meant to see here, and it was a response that the early church saw. It was the fact that when Jesus took bread, He blessed it; and when He took the cup, He gave thanks. It's the Greek word *Eucharist Deo*, from which we sometimes use the word *eucharist*. Now, *eucharist* has all kinds of associations and particularly in Anglicanism and Lutheranism and some other branches of the church, and we Presbyterians are not to say "eucharist" - but it's a perfectly good word. It's simply the Greek for *to give thanks*.

What is the Lord's Supper about? It's about saying, "Thank You, Jesus. Thank You from the very bottom of my heart that You rescued me, that You delivered me, that You brought me out of the miry pit, established my goings; You put my feet upon a rock; You gave me a new heart. You opened my eyes. You enabled me to see things which I had never seen, and You gave me such extraordinary promises that can never be broken. Thank You, Jesus Christ, for all that You have done for me."

My friends, as we think about this this evening, it would have been wonderful, of course, now to have celebrated the Lord's Supper. Spend this week and the coming weeks mulling over in your mind and heart till we celebrate the Supper again that it's a meal that speaks of covenant, that speaks of communion, that speaks of consummation. And may our hearts always be thankful.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank You for Your Son. We thank You for the overwhelming love that sent Him into this world. Holy Spirit, we pray draw us now to commune with Christ, for indeed, we are in union and communion with Him. We can never be separated from Him. We thank You, Lord, that He paid the ransom price to set us

free; that He died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God; that “behold, cursed is everyone who hangs upon a tree,” and He did that for me. We bring You our thanks from the depths of our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Please stand, receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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