

JESUS' BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

Mark 14:1-26

Key Verse: 14:24

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them.”

In chapters 11-13, we studied the “The Lordship of Christ.” The highlight is Jesus’ Second Coming as King of kings and Lord of lords in great power and glory. Now, in chapters 14-16 we want to study the “Suffering Messiah, Glorious Messiah.” Jesus prophesied his suffering, death and resurrection repeatedly. Not only so, but the Old Testament points to these events as the central acts of God’s history. People don’t like suffering. But without suffering, there is no glory. Jesus became our Savior and Lord through his suffering and death on the cross. It is very important to know the meaning of his suffering, death and resurrection. In today’s passage there are two beautiful things. One is a woman pouring out her very expensive perfume on Jesus’ head to express her love for him. The other is Jesus pouring out his blood for us for the forgiveness of our sins, expressing God’s love for us. While the woman’s act is a reflection of Jesus, what Jesus has done is the most beautiful thing. There are so many ugly things in the world. Every day we hear of hatred and violence, terrorism and wars. Even in the church we find ugly things, such as gossip, bitterness, complaining and unforgiving hearts. Ugly deeds stem from self-glory seeking, greed and lust. On the other hand, beautiful things are the fruit of God’s love and self-sacrifice. Do you want to be an ugly person or a beautiful person? We all want to be beautiful people, right? Let’s learn from Jesus.

First, the woman poured perfume on Jesus (1-11). The Passover, commemorating God’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt, was just two days away (1a). It was time for the religious leaders to prepare messages to plant faith in God Almighty and God’s great love for his people. But what were they doing? They were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him (1b). They were filled with jealousy, hatred and a murderous spirit, like Mafia members. But they were afraid of the crowd (2). At this critical time, Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon the Leper (3a). While they were eating, a totally unexpected thing happened: a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. This one jar would have cost more than a year’s wages. To the woman, this jar represented her dreams and

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hopes for the future. Yet she broke this jar and poured the perfume on Jesus' head—not just one or two drops, but the whole jar (3b). She did not give leftovers to Jesus, but her most precious treasure in complete sacrifice. She did this without calculation or expectation. Though her act could have been misunderstood and resulted in embarrassment, she did not care about that at all. She fixed her eyes on Jesus and expressed her love passionately. It was an act of worship for her Savior, Lord and King. The fragrance of her perfume—her love, faith, thanks and honor—filled the house.

How did people respond? Some were indignant and rebuked her harshly, thinking it was a waste (4-5a). From a pragmatic viewpoint they could be right. But they did not see her pure, sacrificial love for Jesus, her sincerity or her gratitude. Moreover, they did not see that Jesus was worthy to receive such a lavish offering. They seemed to be concerned about the poor. But this just masked their greed. This mindset is not unusual. There are many who say nothing when others spend lavishly for their sinful desires, but become indignant at those who pour their money, time and energy on Jesus. As we cannot regard a mother's tears for her children as mere water, or H₂O, so we cannot put a dollar amount on what is given to Jesus sacrificially. Among us, many are like this woman. Joann Ismael decided to offer one year to Jesus in order to serve young people as a shepherd. She has been a blessing to many, though persecuted by family members. Pauline Lee left her home in Toronto to serve young people in Chicago for six months as her offering to Jesus. Christian Misurac walks from her home to Columbia College every week to serve group Bible studies even though her belly is swollen. Sammy Lee, though not a woman, is also dedicating one year to serve Jesus as a shepherd for students. If we tried to mention all such beautiful people around us, this message may never end. We should highly value those who sacrifice wholeheartedly for Jesus.

Let's see how Jesus valued the woman's act. Jesus said, **“Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me”** (6). Jesus always understands, accepts and values our devotion highly as **“a beautiful thing.”** In what respect was the woman's act beautiful to Jesus? First, it was given at the right time. We can help the poor anytime we want. But in serving Jesus, timing is important (7). Opportunity comes to those who are ready. People think that they can serve God whenever they want, perhaps after graduation, marriage and getting a good job. But in fact, it is harder to

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serve God as time passes by. The best time to serve God is in one's college days. In any case, when we have time and money, youth and energy, we should use them to serve God passionately. Second, she did her best to serve Jesus. In verse 8, Jesus said, **"She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial."** She did not know how Jesus would receive her act. But when she did her best, Jesus received it as the anointing for his body before burial. Likewise, when we do our best for Jesus, he will use it more greatly than we may imagine.

Jesus did more than compliment the woman's act. He said, **"Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her"** (9). Jesus made this a memorial event that would be acknowledged throughout eternity. When we celebrate Memorial Day, we remember with gratitude men and women of sacrifice and renew this spirit. Likewise, when we hear of this woman's act, we can renew the spirit of worshiping Jesus with all our hearts. In contrast to the woman, Judas Iscariot would betray Jesus for money (10-11). In truth, everyone has their own alabaster jar. The question is, "What will we do with it?" Some hoard their alabaster jar. Others break it on unworthy things, and are left broken and wounded. Jesus is the only one worthy of our total sacrifice, full devotion and wholehearted worship. Why is this so?

Second, Jesus poured out his blood for us (12-26). The background of this event is the Passover meal, which was established by God and had been celebrated by the Jews for about 1,500 years. It was fulfilled by Jesus who instituted the Lord's Supper. Now we celebrate communion commemorating what Jesus did. In verses 12-16, Jesus and his disciples prepared the Passover. It was the first day of the Festival, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb (12a). The Passover was celebrated family by family (Ex 12:3). Jesus' disciples were his family members (Mk 3:34-35). When they asked where to go to prepare, Jesus sent two of them to follow a man carrying a jar of water to a place furnished and ready (12b-15). Through this Jesus revealed his divine foresight: he knew all that would happen in detail. Jesus also kept the location a secret from Judas in order to celebrate this historical Passover without disturbance.

In verses 17-26 Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover. That evening, they were reclining at the table eating the Passover. The Passover

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meal is called a “Seder” in Hebrew. A Seder plate was prepared with Zeroah (roasted lamb), Karpas (a green vegetable, usually parsley), Chazeret (a bitter herb, perhaps romaine lettuce), Charoset (a sweet salad of apples, nuts, wine and cinnamon), Maror (a bitter herb, horseradish) and a Baytsa (roasted egg). In addition, servings of three Matzah (unleavened bread) and four cups of Wine were prepared for each participant. Let's consider how the Lord's Supper followed the order of the Passover Seder.

1. Preparation: Removal of Chametz. This refers to getting rid of all yeast from the house which symbolized the bad influence of hidden sin. Jesus practiced this spiritually by addressing the problem of Judas Iscariot. Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.” They were saddened. It was a time of self-examination for them all. One by one they said, “Surely you don't mean me?” They became suspicious of themselves and of each other. Then Jesus said clearly, “It is one of the Twelve, one who dips bread into the bowl with me.” Jesus knew who would betray him. Historically, if Julius Caesar had known who would betray him, he would have killed him right away. But Jesus was not like that. He was ready to obey God's will. He wanted Judas to know how serious this betrayal was, and challenged him to repent. We all have the possibility to be like Judas. So we must repent sincerely in order to have communion with Jesus. St. Paul said, “Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Cor 11:28).

2. Lighting the Passover Candles. This symbolizes the presence of God and marks the event as sacred. The mother leads people in saying, “May the lights we now kindle inspire us to use our strength which you so freely give us to help and not to hinder, to love and not to hate, to bless and not to curse, to serve and worship you, O God of freedom!” **3. The First Cup: the Cup of Sanctification and Freedom.** This is the first of four cups. Each cup symbolizes the fulfillment of one of the promises in Exodus 6:6-7. This first cup symbolizes the freedom from oppression that God gave his people. **4. The Washing.** This set a tone of sacredness for the occasion, reflecting the purity of heart and hands that should be exhibited as God's people. **5. Karpas—The Green Vegetable (Parsley).** They took the Karpas in hand, saying, “This represents life, created and sustained by the Lord.” A Scripture reading was taken from the Song of Songs—the love song between a man and woman. Men would say: “**Arise my love and come away...**” (Song 2:10-13).

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Women would respond, “**My beloved is mine and I am his...**” (Song 2:3-4,16). It symbolized the love of God for his people, as a husband loves his wife. Before eating the Karpas, it was dipped in saltwater that symbolized the suffering and tears of the Israelites in bondage. Life is not only springtime and romance, but also includes suffering, pain and tears.

6. Breaking of Bread: The Matzah. Perhaps this was the most important part of the meal. Messianic Jews have come to recognize in the Matzah, the three pieces of unleavened bread, the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with the Son represented by the middle piece. After the temple was destroyed and the lamb could no longer be offered, this Matzah symbolized the Paschal lamb. The middle Matzah was taken and broken. One half of this piece, called the Afikomen, was hidden in the room to be discovered by children. The other half was shared together among all participants. It was at this point that Jesus took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “**Take it; this is my body.**” Jesus’ body was broken for our sins. In this way Jesus became the living Bread. So Jesus said, “**I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry...whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life...**” (Jn 6:35,54).

7. The Story of Passover. Based on the Biblical command, this was a question and answer session in which parents explained to their children how God had delivered them through the Exodus. Bible study is storytelling. During this time, the Baytsa (roasted egg) was displayed as a symbol of new life and hope. It reminds us of Jesus’ resurrection. **8. The Second Cup: the Cup of Deliverance.** As they drank a second cup of wine they praised God for delivering them from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from darkness to light, and from slavery to redemption. **9. The Meal.** They ate a piece of Matzah, bitter herbs and a Hillel sandwich. These were dipped in Charoset, producing a mix of bitterness and sweetness that evoked both compassion for those who were suffering, and hope for the future.

10. The Third Cup: the Cup of Redemption. This cup was offered symbolically to Elijah the prophet, the forerunner of the Messiah. Before drinking this cup, the Afikomen was searched for and found by children. It signifies hope for the future redemption. In fact, the Afikomen represents the Messiah who redeems us from our sins. It was most likely at this point in the

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Seder that Jesus took the cup, gave thanks and gave it to his disciples, saying, **“This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many.”** The words **“poured out”** indicate a violent death and express Jesus' full devotion.

Here, as the footnote suggests, Jesus introduces the “new covenant,” in contrast to the old. After deliverance, God brought his people to Mount Sinai and shared his vision to raise them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. He gave them the law and established a covenant with them. A covenant is similar to marriage. It requires a unique commitment and a wholehearted, lifetime devotion. That covenant was sealed with animal blood. It was a conditional covenant, dependent on their obedience. They failed to keep it due to their sinful nature. So the covenant relationship was broken by their disobedience. Nevertheless, God did not abandon them. He promised to make a new covenant with them. In Jeremiah 31:33b-34, the Lord declares, **“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”** The new covenant is different than the old; it is unconditional and dependent on God's one-sided grace and love. It does not depend on man's effort and deeds, but on God's mercy to forgive our sins and redeem us from the power of sin through the blood of Jesus. At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the new covenant of intimate love between God and his people. This covenant cannot be broken because it is sealed by the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God (Heb 9:14). Sin is like a strong chain that we cannot break by our willpower or effort. It is easy to underestimate the power of sin, thinking we can enjoy it and then forget about it. But we find that we are bound by the chain of sin. Only the blood of Jesus can break the power of sin and set us free. One young man thought he could enjoy pornography and forget about it. But he found himself bound helplessly and sinking deeper and deeper into darkness. He hated the way sin was destroying his personality and relationships. He tried hard to get out. But nothing helped. But when he believed in Jesus' blood, the chains of sin were broken. He was set free to love and serve God. Now he is teaching the Bible to students and living as a shepherd for others. When we accept Jesus' blood, we have a covenant with the living God. Not only so, but we become part of a covenant community. This community is unique among human communities.

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Jesus is the Head and believers are members of his body (1Co 12:27; Eph 5:30; Col 1:18). Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ...We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ."¹

11. The Fourth Cup: the Cup of Thanksgiving and Hope. The Seder was completed with the cup of thanksgiving and hope. It must have been while drinking this cup that Jesus said, "**Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.**" Jesus had celebrated the Passover with thanksgiving to God and was full of hope in the kingdom of God in the midst of his impending suffering and death. Then they sang a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives to pray.

Since Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper 2,000 years ago, Christians have commemorated it with communion. Luke and Apostle Paul both quote Jesus saying, "**Do this in remembrance of me**" (Lk 22:19; 1Co 11:24-25). As we take the bread and cup, remembering what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we renew a covenant relationship with Jesus. We also renew our membership in his covenant community. As we enter into this Easter season, let's remember Jesus' grace of forgiveness and live as new covenant people.

¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*, (New York, Harper & Rowe Publishers, Inc., 1954), p. 21.