

The Lord's Supper
Mark 14:12-26
Key Verse: 14:24

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' he said to them."

Today, right after this message, we are going to celebrate communion. Communion was instituted by Jesus during his last meal with his disciples while celebrating the Passover. In fact, communion is the fulfillment of the Passover. It has a profound meaning. Through the Passover, God wanted the Israelites to remember all the days of their lives God's mighty deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Dt 16:3). While instituting communion Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19). God wants us to remember what he has done. Otherwise, we become self-centered instead of God-centered. We forget all the good and gracious things God has done, and think only about what we have done. When we think we have done well, we become proud, self-righteous and condemning of others. When we think we have not done well, we fall into self-condemnation. When we are self-centered, carrying out God's mission seems burdensome. However, when we remember what God has done for us, we are full of grace and thanks. We can serve God joyfully without complaining. Communion was given to restore our relationship with God. It was also given to restore our relationships with others. We hurt one another due to our sins, unintentionally and intentionally. This leads to bitterness and grudges that make us miserable. But we can restore love relationships in the grace of Jesus through communion. Let's remember what God has done for us and restore our relationships with God, and with each other.

First, preparations (12-16). The people of Israel celebrated three important festivals every year: the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Tabernacles. The Festival of Unleavened Bread also included the Passover. Among three festivals, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover were most important, and all the Israelites traveled to Jerusalem to observe them.

Verse 12a says, "On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb...." The Festival of Unleavened Bread began with the Passover meal. It was not a personal matter, but a national event which was celebrated family by family. It was not a time of enjoying fine food and relaxing. It was a time to remember God's grace of deliverance from the terrible bondage in Egypt. The menu included lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs--which were the symbol of affliction. Central to the Passover was the sacrifice of a lamb. On the night God delivered the Israelites, he had them slaughter year-old lambs without defect. They ate the meat of the lambs and put its blood on the doorframes of their houses. That night, when the Angel of death descended upon Egypt, he put to death all the firstborn. But when he saw the blood of a lamb on the doorframe of a house, he "passed over" that house, sparing those inside. Whether the people inside were good or bad, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, brown, yellow or white, was not considered. All that mattered is whether they had the blood of the lamb on their doorframes.

The Israelites commemorated the Passover faithfully for many centuries. It was still celebrated in Jesus' time. Jesus and his disciples were a spiritual family, so they celebrated the Passover together. The disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" Though Jesus is the Eternal God through whom all things were made, he had no place to lay his head (Mt 8:20). He had to borrow a room to celebrate the Passover. So he sent two of his disciples to prepare a place. Luke tells us that it was Peter and John (Lk 22:8). Jesus sent them into the city with instructions to follow a man carrying a jar of water. He would lead them to a large upper room, furnished and ready. There, they could prepare the Passover. Jesus spoke in such a way that the address of the house was concealed. Why? It was to hide the location from enemies who might disrupt it. Jesus eagerly wanted to eat this Passover with his disciples so that he might teach them the meaning of his suffering and death. Peter and John obeyed Jesus without question, found things just as Jesus had said they would, and prepared the Passover (16). In this part Jesus revealed that he is the Almighty God who sees and knows everything. At the same time he prepared the Passover in detail, according to God's words. Here we learn that preparation is very important. Many of us have been preparing Easter Bible conferences by campus. May God help us prepare wholeheartedly, with faith and obedience, to the end.

Second, betrayal (17-21). "When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve" (17). "While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me--one who is eating with me.'" Reclining at the table and eating implies the most intimate fellowship. Jesus knew he would be betrayed by one of his most trusted disciples. Psalm 41:9 predicted Jesus' betrayal. It says, "Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me." Upon hearing this, the disciples must have been surprised; they were also saddened. Then one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?" It is interesting that none of the disciples pointed at another, but each one defended himself. They wanted to confirm that they were loyal to Jesus and had no intention of betraying him. However, this question implies a possibility for each of them to betray Jesus. Jesus replied, "It is one of the Twelve, one who dips bread into the bowl with me" (20). Then Jesus gave a strong warning to the betrayer. Look at verse 21. "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." Historically, Julius Caesar and Joseph Stalin were betrayed by people close to them and assassinated. They did not know they would be betrayed. If they knew, they would have executed the betrayer immediately. Jesus knew he would be betrayed by Judas. However, he did not get rid of him. Rather, he invited him to share the last supper and warned him that betrayal would have grave consequences.

Why did Jesus tell of his betrayal to his disciples, including Judas, in this way? In the first place, Jesus wanted to give Judas a chance to repent. Though Judas would betray Jesus, Jesus did not betray Judas. Jesus knew that Judas' soul would be condemned eternally. So he had great compassion on him. Jesus loved Judas to the end. Jesus' love is unfailing. Jesus loves even those who betray him. When we are betrayed by Bible students whom we have loved and served as our own children, we are broken hearted; it is unbearable. But Jesus loved even Judas to the end. Jesus' love never fails. In the second place, Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that God was in control of the event. If Jesus died due to Judas' betrayal, his life and ministry would seem to be a failure. All the beautiful things that Jesus had done would be nothing more than sweet memories. We would think that all good things will eventually be swallowed up by evil things. There would be no meaning. There would be no reason to do good things. But Jesus' betrayal and death were foretold by Scripture. Jesus' death precisely fulfilled God's will. Jesus wanted his disciples to realize that God was in control. Later Peter declared, "This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge" (Ac 2:23). It is the Almighty God who rules the world to carry out his own salvation purpose; it is not evil men or the devil. When we believe this, we can have the conviction that God reigns and find the courage to do good things in any situation.

What happened to Judas? According to John's gospel, as soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out and it was night (Jn 13:30). Later he was seized with remorse for what he had done. But he did not repent. Instead, he went away and hanged himself (Mt 27:3,5). Satan had tried to destroy Jesus' community through Judas' betrayal. Jesus did not react emotionally, but dealt with this problem based on the Scriptures. In this way Jesus won the victory over Satan's attack and protected his community. Jesus' community was the foundation of the church. Through the church Jesus preserved the truth about his death and resurrection and enabled the proclamation of the gospel for future generations. While Jesus was living, he protected his community from the attacks of the evil one. After Jesus' ascension, the Holy Spirit has protected his church. Thank you, Holy Spirit!

Third, communion (22-26). After solving Judas' problem, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. Through the Passover he explained to them the meaning of his suffering and death, and instituted communion.

Look at verse 22. "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take it; this is my body.'" Jesus related the bread to his body, which would be offered on the cross as a ransom for our sins. Jesus' death on the cross was not a death of the soul; it was a death of the body. Jesus suffered in the body. He was slapped in the face and spat upon. A crown of thorns was pressed into his skull. When he was whipped, his flesh was ripped from his body. On the cross, his hands and feet were pierced with nails and his side was pierced with a spear. Finally, Jesus died with a loud shout. Jesus was not an apparition or a ghost. Jesus had a body like us. His suffering and death were real. All of this suffering was because of our sins. When Jesus offered bread to his disciples, he was offering himself as a ransom sacrifice for them.

What does it mean to eat his body? It is to accept Jesus' sacrifice for us personally. It is to accept his love and to enter into a covenant relationship with him. As we eat his body, he becomes part of us. Just as our physical bodies grow strong and healthy through eating nutritious food, so our faith and spirits grow strong and healthy through eating Jesus' body. This requires a decision of faith and commitment, and it is intensely personal. At the same time, it is done in community. And this community becomes the body of Christ. The body is an important metaphor for the church (Ro 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:12 ff.) As we restore our personal relationship with God, we also affirm our membership in the church, which is his body. As we humbly ask and receive Christ's forgiveness, we should also forgive and accept one another.

Jesus continued by explaining the meaning of taking the cup. Look at verses 23-24. "Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' he said to them." Jesus' blood is called the blood of the covenant. Luke's gospel emphasizes that it is a new covenant (Lk 22:20). God found fault with people under the old covenant, as Hebrews 8 explains so well. God gave them laws written on tablets of stone which they should obey. But they failed in their own ability and effort. They broke God's covenant. Then God provided a new covenant. God put his laws in the minds and hearts of his people. In the new covenant, salvation does not depend on people's effort, but on God's one-sided grace. It does not require obedience to be saved--only faith. We just need to come to God as we are and accept what God has done. Anyone who has faith in Jesus can be saved and become a child of God. What a great blessing to become a child of God only by faith in Christ. Through the new covenant we find that God understands how weak we are due to our sins. Instead of crushing us in our failures, God made a new covenant for us. This shows how much God loves us. Thank you, Father God, for your great love!

Mark 14:24a says, "This is my blood of the covenant...." The new covenant is sealed in Jesus' blood, not animal's blood. In Matthew 26:28, we can see the contents of the covenant. Jesus said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus shed his blood to forgive our sins. Why was this necessary? Hebrews 9:22 says, "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Due to our sins, we must die, shedding our blood. And death is not the end of our lives. After death, we must face judgment and eternal condemnation in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. But God had mercy on us and provided a way to be saved. The Old Testament introduced this, as God established the animal sacrifice system. This system was effective to obtain forgiveness. But its effect was only temporary, and the sacrifices insufficient. Animals had to be sacrificed again and again. Because of man's sins millions of animals were sacrificed. Still, it was not enough. And these sacrifices did not cleanse the sinner's conscience. This, however, did foreshadow the coming of Christ. Hebrews 9:14 says, "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God." Jesus' blood has power to take away all our sins, and its effect is eternal. Jesus was sacrificed once for all. Hebrews 10:14 says, "For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." Jesus' blood is sufficient to cleanse all our dirty sins and to save us from eternal condemnation. Jesus' blood enables us to serve the living God. We need Jesus' blood to be saved and to serve God. Without the blood of Jesus it is impossible to be purified from sin. Living in this world, we sin. Jesus once compared his people to those who have had a bath, but need to have their feet washed daily. Daily sins make us dirty, like feet that are soiled. Jesus is willing to wash our dirty feet. Let's come to Jesus and be washed in his blood. Thank you, Jesus!

Jesus' blood not only purifies us from our sins, but has power to transform our inner person. Sometimes we wonder, "Even though I believe in Jesus, my inner life does not seem to change. My bad habits still remain and bother me." We try to change ourselves with our own willpower. We try to compensate by doing good things, such as donating blood. Or we torture ourselves. But when we find that these things do not work, we despair, give up and become fatalistic Christians, thinking that we will not change until Jesus comes again. This happens because we depend on our own efforts and not on the blood of Jesus. If we really and totally surrender ourselves to God and depend on Jesus' blood, then his blood will circulate within us and will change our inner person. John Newton lived a corrupted life as a seaman, one marked by drinking, gambling and profanity. He entered the slave trade and was involved in the trafficking of 20,000 people. During one voyage to England his ship was suddenly hit by a fierce storm. In the midst of that storm, Newton realized that he would go straight to hell if he died. Then, remembering Bible stories he learned from his grandmother, he fell to his knees and begged God's mercy. By a miracle, the ship was spared and made it safely to shore. Newton went to the nearest church and surrendered his life to Christ, accepting Jesus' blood

for his cleansing. He was changed little by little until he became a fruitful pastor and a great hymn writer. Some 34 years after he retired from the slave trade, he published a pamphlet that exposed its wickedness and his sincere repentance for being involved in it. This was a valuable element in bringing about the abolition of slavery in England. Newton was not changed all at once. But as he allowed the blood of Jesus to cleanse him daily, he was gradually changed into a holy man of God.

In verse 25, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of God." This means that his death on the cross is not the end. After that, there will be his resurrection and ascension into the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God there will be the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7). When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives (26). In the midst of one beloved disciple's betrayal, and his impending suffering and death on the cross, Jesus sang a hymn. Then he went to the Mount of Olives in order to pray at the Garden of Gethsemane.

Today we have seen how Jesus instituted communion. Jesus gave his disciples bread to eat and a cup to drink. Jesus had said in John 6:54-55, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink." Jesus also commanded us: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24). Let's remember what Jesus has done for us on the cross.