

The New Covenant in Jesus' Blood

Luke 22:1-23

Key Verse: 22:20

by Kevin Albright

"In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"

This coming weekend we will gather in groups at our Easter Bible conferences to learn more deeply the core of the Christian faith: Jesus' death and resurrection. This is the gospel, the good news of God--through our Lord Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven and we have eternal life in God's kingdom. Today, we want to think about Jesus' words to his disciples at his Last Supper. We will also celebrate the Lord's Supper since Jesus commanded his disciples, "do this in remembrance of me." If you believe in Jesus Christ and confess him as your Lord and Savior you are invited to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

1. The Passover was approaching (1-6)

First, remembering the Passover. Look at verse 1. "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching..." In verses 1-16, the Passover is mentioned or alluded to 8 times. Jesus' last meal was a Passover meal. Jesus gave his life during an annual Passover season.

What is the Passover? It is an important annual feast for the Jewish people. The Passover recalls an event in Moses' time when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. God gave a message through Moses to the king of Egypt, "Let my people go." When he refused, God sent 10 plagues on Egypt as judgment on the 'gods of Egypt.' The final plague was on the firstborn. Every firstborn throughout Egypt would die. But God gave the Israelite slaves directions how to save their firstborn: they had to smear the blood of a lamb on the doorframes of their homes. As the LORD executed judgment throughout Egypt, he 'passed over' the homes that had the lamb's blood. This was such a devastating plague that the king of Egypt finally let the Israelites go. They were freed after 400 years--many generations--of slavery. Thus, the Passover commemorated two things: the salvation of their firstborn from death, and their freedom from slavery. The Passover marked the birth of a free nation, Israel, like their independence day. Since that time, the Jews have celebrated the Passover annually as a time of thanks and praise to God for his great deliverance and salvation.

Second, the devil's work in several people. Understanding the importance of the Passover, in Jesus' time the leaders of Israel should have led the people in this holy commemoration. But what were they doing? Verse 2 tells us, "...and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people." It is shocking that the leaders of God's chosen people were plotting how to get rid of Jesus. They wanted to arrest Jesus away from the public eye, since people thronged to Jesus. Jesus was loved and respected by the crowds because he went around doing good--healing the sick, driving out demons and proclaiming the message of God's kingdom. The leaders acted out of fear of men and envy of Jesus. They were spiritually blind and gave the devil an open door to come in and use them for evil.

Even one of Jesus' own disciples was used by the devil. Look at verses 3-6. "Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present." How could one so close to Jesus, one of his own Twelve chosen disciples, do this? Luke explains that Satan entered Judas Iscariot. It was the devil's work in Judas. Our enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour and use for evil. How can we overcome the devil? The Bible says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (Jas 4:7) It also says, "...do not give the devil a foothold." (Eph 4:27) No one can defeat the devil with his own strength or wisdom. So Jesus taught us to pray, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." When Jesus faced the devil's temptations, he showed us how to resist the devil by holding on to God's word and by loving God.

2. Jesus' Last Supper (7-20)

First, Jesus is our Passover lamb. Look at verse 7. The day of Unleavened Bread came. The unleavened bread (matzah) reminded them of their hasty departure from Egypt. Luke says that this was the day 'on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.' This alludes to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 Paul wrote, "For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed." During the original Passover, the firstborn children of Israel were saved by the lamb's blood. But Jesus' blood saves everyone who trusts in him from their sins. John the Baptist understood this and testified of Jesus, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Peter also called Jesus a sacrificial lamb saying, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1Pe 1:18) By faith in Jesus' blood, we sinners can be saved from God's righteous judgment, delivered from our slavery to sin, and healed from our sinsicknesses. By faith in Jesus' blood, we are Jesus' sheep, and no one can snatch us out of his hand. We are saved from our sins by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Eternal praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ, our Passover lamb!

Second, make preparations by obeying Jesus. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." They asked him where they were to prepare for it. Jesus told them in verses 10-12. "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there." Bible scholars say this was likely the home of John Mark, who wrote Mark's gospel.

What is significant of Jesus' directions here? For one thing, it shows Jesus' omniscience. Jesus knew in great detail all that was going to transpire in the next 24 hours. Though things would soon look out of control with Jesus' arrest and trial, God was in complete control. Notice that Jesus seemed to intentionally keep the Passover place secret. Perhaps this was to avoid informing Judas who might lead his enemies there. Jesus still wanted time to prepare himself for his death in a night of prayer. Jesus also wanted time to teach his disciples the new meaning of the Passover meal.

Look at verse 13. "They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover." One thing we learn here is that for those who follow Jesus' instructions, things work out. On the other hand, when we follow our own plans, desires or ideas, things often get messed up. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Proverbs 14:12 warns, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." To grow as a disciple of Jesus, one must learn to listen to Jesus and put Jesus' word ahead of his own plan, idea or desire. Blessed and wise are those who put Jesus' words into practice.

Third, the meaning of Jesus' body given for us. Look at verses 14-18. "When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.' After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, 'Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'" Jesus eagerly wanted to teach his disciples the meaning of his suffering and death before it happened. Jesus would soon suffer and die. But he knew his death would not be the end. His death would open the way to the feast in the kingdom of God.

Let's read verse 19 together. "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'" Jesus took the bread and gave thanks to God. How could Jesus thank God when he knew that he would suffer and die a brutal death? Jesus gave thanks knowing that God is good. "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever." (Ps 136:1) Life is hard. But God is good. God is our Protector, our Provider, and our loving Father in heaven. The Lord will rescue us from every evil attack and bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom (2Ti 4:18). We can give thanks in all circumstances when we believe firmly that God is good and God's will is good, pleasing and perfect.

Jesus broke the bread and gave it to his disciples. Soon Jesus would allow his own body to be broken, wounded, torn, and bruised for our salvation. Peter later wrote, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." (1Pe 2:24) Jesus gave the bread to his disciples and said, "This is my body given for you..." Jesus gave his body to be beaten, whipped and crucified on their behalf and ours too. 1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." Is there any greater love than this? Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command." (Jn 15:13-14)

What does it mean that Jesus' body is our bread? Jesus once declared to a hungry, demanding crowd in John 6, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (Jn 6:35) Again, Jesus said to the same people, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me." (Jn 6:56-57) What does it mean to 'feed on Jesus'? To feed on Jesus is to have a living personal relationship with him through faith and prayer. To feed on Jesus is to come to him in faith every day and throughout the day for strength, sustenance, guidance and fulfillment. To feed on Jesus is to find joy, hope and meaning by relying on him.

Jesus also said, "...do this in remembrance of me." Just as the Jews commemorate the Passover every year, Jesus wants his followers to commemorate his sacrifice and commune with him and with other believers in Christ. We can remember Jesus and thank him every time we see a cross, every time we worship, every time we pray. This coming weekend we will gather at our Easter conferences to more deeply commune with Jesus and with others in his name. May the grace and love of his death and the glory and hope of his resurrection be real and move us each personally. Today we also celebrate communion as a church to remember and thank Jesus and to be newly united with him and with other believers in his name.

Fourth, the meaning of Jesus' blood poured out for us. Let's read verse 20. "In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'" Jesus said the cup is a 'new covenant.' What is a covenant? Biblically, a covenant is a binding relationship between two parties. In this case, the new covenant is a binding relationship between Jesus and his followers. Then what was the old covenant? We call the Hebrew Scriptures the Old Testament, or Old Covenant. In the Old Testament, God made several covenants with people and their descendants, including Noah (Gen 9:11ff) and Abraham (Gen 17:7ff). In Moses' time, God made a covenant with his people Israel, saying, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex 19:5-6) Then God gave them his laws, including the Ten Commandments, for them to obey. The people responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." Then Moses took the blood of offerings, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." (Ex 24:8) This was the old covenant, but it was conditional, based on the peoples' obedience.

Jeremiah prophesied of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34, which the New Testament quotes in Hebrews 8:8-12. It says: "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "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 a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Jesus established this new covenant 'in his blood.' His blood refers to his blood shed on the cross. Matthew 26:28 says more directly, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." The blood of Jesus has power to save and cleanse sinners from their sins. Romans 3:25 says of Jesus, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood." Hebrews 9:14-15 compares the blood of goats and bulls with the blood of Jesus: "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! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant." Jesus' blood was poured out for us, to purify us from all sin.

The forgiveness of sins is not the final objective. It is the means to an end. The end objective is a new covenant--a new and right relationship with God as children of God and heirs of his kingdom. Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." The Holy Spirit gives us confidence to call God, "Father." Jesus died to open a new way of relationship between God and all people through the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit at work in every believer makes this new relationship with God possible. For example, sin can make a person cold and rude toward God and others. But the new covenant in Jesus' blood can make this same person warm and friendly to God and others. Sin makes people wild and rebellious. But the new covenant in Jesus' blood and the work of the Holy Spirit changes people to be humble and joyful. I know so many people who have been changed by the power and grace of Jesus through faith in him. I will share just one example. One young man had no living relationship with Christ, though he attended church regularly. I think he would say he attended church to feel good about himself and to look down on others. He used to listen to dark and rebellious music. He had a foul mouth and delighted in lewd thoughts with no reason or power to resist. Then he studied the Bible, cautiously at first. Gradually he found joy, hope, meaning and new life in Jesus, which he did not have before. Many can testify to the changing power of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Can you? This change is possible and real through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection.

As Jesus offered the cup to his disciples, he offers salvation to all sinners. There is power in the blood of Jesus Christ. Only his blood can take away our sins. Have you taken Jesus' body and blood in faith? Are you in a covenant relationship with Jesus? Some are hindered by fear, fear of losing something in order to follow Jesus. But Jesus promised a hundred times more than anything we sacrifice to follow him (Mt 19:29). Some are obstructed by pride, thinking they are good enough. The Bible says "there is no one righteous, not even one." (Ro 3:10) Some are hindered by guilt: How could God forgive my sin?" The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1Jn 1:9) Some are hindered by unbelief: "I tried to change myself, but it didn't work. I don't think I can be changed." 2Co 5:17 disagrees with this pessimism saying, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

For those who have received Jesus' grace, don't be complacent or depend on your own goodness or effort. You still need his grace. It is only his grace that has saved you and that will continue to save and sanctify you. Keep on trusting in him alone, not in a righteousness of your own. Also, if you know his saving grace, don't keep it to yourself. Proclaim it to others with love and joy, that they too may hear his promise and enter into a relationship with Jesus through the new covenant in his blood.