

THE NEW COVENANT IN JESUS' BLOOD

Luke 22:1-23

Key Verse: 22:20

“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.’”

In the last passage Jesus taught us that history is moving toward a great conclusion. It is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in power and great glory as King and Judge. It is the day of final victory for those who believe in him and stand firm to the end, at the risk of their lives. But it is the day of everlasting punishment for the cowardly and unbelieving and all those who hated Jesus. We have final victory in our Lord Jesus Christ. This spring, both Deborah Kang and Sarah Won had glorious graduation ceremonies, each receiving a doctoral degree. Deborah received a Pharm.D. and Sarah an M.D.. After many sleepless nights and many kinds of struggles, and by the help of their respective coworkers, each one had a glorious day of graduation. From now on, they will be known as “Dr. Deborah Kang,” and “Dr. Sarah Won” for the rest of their lives. May God use them as doctors who can heal not only the physical body but also the spirits of young people in America through Bible study and prayer. In the same way, children of God will enjoy a glorious day of great victory when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again in power and glory. Therefore, let us stand firm in the midst of persecution and troubling events in the world. We can do so when we pray for God’s help. Let us follow the example of Jesus who taught the word of God from early morning and spent the night in prayer. This summer, let us work hard as one-to-one Bible teachers until God may grant us 1,000 one-to-one Bible studies per week.

In today’s passage Jesus teaches his disciples about the new covenant in his blood that he shed on the cross. This new covenant in Jesus’ blood is at the core of Christian faith. May God help each of us to accept the new covenant in Jesus’ blood through this study.

First, Jesus was betrayed by Judas (1-6).

Look at verses 1-2. “Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, 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.” A most important spiritual event was approaching for the people of Israel: the Passover. The chief priests and the teachers of the law should have been busy preparing for it. They had messages to deliver and ceremonies to perform. They should have put life-giving effort into serving God as they were called to do. Instead, they were consumed with the thought of getting rid of Jesus. To them, getting rid of Jesus was a matter of life and death. They considered every possibility. Each time they confronted Jesus directly, they were completely humiliated by his words of wisdom. So they looked for another way. They could do nothing openly because ordinary people, who heard the word of life from Jesus, would defend him. But finally, a way presented itself.

Look at verses 3-4. “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.” Luke says that Satan entered Judas and that Judas was one of the Twelve. This is surprising. The Twelve had been personally chosen by Jesus. These Twelve had been with Jesus for more than three years. Jesus was the personal trainer of each one of them. At one time, Jesus had given them power and authority to drive out demons and heal the sick. Jesus had prepared them to take over his earthly ministry. And yet, Satan entered Judas Iscariot. When Satan entered him, Judas became as evil as Satan. Judas might have been surprised to see his own feet moving in the direction of the chief priest. He might have felt he was watching someone else and listening to someone else when it was actually he who was speaking of betraying Jesus. Now, he was no longer himself; he was Satan’s agent. When he suggested to the religious leaders that he might possibly betray Jesus, a shriek of delight went up; they lost no time to grab this chance. They agreed to give him money. Verse 6 says, “He consented and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.”

Whenever we think about Judas Iscariot, we feel cold chills. How could one of the Twelve betray Jesus? It was possible when he did not really commit himself to Christ. In Luke’s account, Jesus first speaks of his betrayal in 9:44. It was shortly after his teaching that the Christ must suffer and die on the cross and that anyone who would come after him must imitate his life of mission. Probably from that moment, Judas had opened a “back door” in his mind and heart as an escape hatch if things got too tough. One rich and famous movie star married a lady movie star

who was not quite as rich and famous. He made her sign a prenuptial agreement stating that only after ten years of marriage would they have joint ownership of property. After nine years and ten months, he divorced her. Obviously, throughout the time of their marriage, he was always ready to divorce. He left open a “back door” to escape with his money. In the same way, Judas left open a “back door” and did not fully commit himself to Christ. In Luke 9:23, Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” We must take these words to heart and commit our lives to Christ. We are weak, but he is strong. He will enable us to follow him when we truly commit our lives to him. However, if we leave a “back door” open, we can become Satan’s prey.

Satan seemed to be howling at the Last Supper. But we must not give him too much credit. Without God’s permission, he can do nothing. We must realize that, in the final analysis, God is the Sovereign Ruler. God could have destroyed Satan long ago. But God tolerates the work of Satan and uses it for his own good purpose. John Calvin said that God tolerates demons to punish uncommitted people. God wants us to commit our lives to Christ. Then we become strong to resist the devil. May God help each of us to commit our lives to Christ. It is possible through the new covenant in Jesus’ blood.

Second, Jesus and his disciples prepare the Passover (7-16).

Look at verse 7. “Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.” The Feast of Unleavened Bread was seven days in length, which began with the celebration of the Passover. The Passover had deep historical meaning (Ex 12). It commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. Their lives in Egypt were really miserable. They had to undergo forced labor and constant humiliation. They worked hard, regardless of their physical condition, and ate very little; their skin clung to their bones. Their drained bodies were whipped without mercy. Their lives in Egypt were an exact picture of slavery to Satan, and a description of hell.

God had mercy on his people and decided to deliver them. But Pharaoh, king of Egypt, did not let the Israelites go. God sent plagues on Egypt, one after another. As each plague came, Pharaoh promised to let the people go. But when the plague abated, he changed his mind. The plagues were repeated nine times. Finally God gave Pharaoh a choice: either let the people go, or see God strike down all the firstborn of all kinds in Egypt (Ex 12:29). Pharaoh did not listen to God’s words through Moses. Pharaoh was a symbol of the power of sin. In his stubborn sinfulness, he invited the plague of death. No firstborn was exempt, not even the firstborn of Pharaoh the king. In the meantime, the Israelites were to slay a lamb. It had to be a one-year-old male lamb without defect. They ate the flesh of the lamb. Then, using the hyssop plant like a brush, they were to smear the blood of the lamb on the lintels and doorposts of their houses. When the angel of death saw the blood, he passed over that house. We call this the Passover. In this way God saved the Israelites from the death plague. In this way God made the Exodus possible for the Israelites. To eat the Passover was to remember God’s grace of deliverance from the yoke of slavery in Egypt.

Jesus and his disciples customarily celebrated the Passover. But this Passover was to be quite special. To prepare for it, Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” They were ready to obey immediately. But Jesus did not tell them where to go. Like soldiers before their commander they asked, “Where do you want us to prepare for it, sir!” Look at verses 10-12. “He replied, ‘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.’” Jesus must have withheld the location deliberately to prevent Judas Iscariot from giving advance notice to the religious leaders. Jesus did not want this Passover celebration hindered in any way. So Jesus sent Peter and John. They were men of obedience without question. It was not because they did not think, but because they knew that Jesus is the Lord. Their faith in Jesus grew when they humbly obeyed his word on a daily basis. Finally they learned the obedience that comes from faith. Those who really obey Jesus’ words can grow in faith like them. Look at verse 13. “They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.”

When evening came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 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.” Jesus expressed his inner desire to his disciples. It was to eat this Passover with them before he suffered. Jesus had been looking forward to this moment for a long time. It was the time he would explain to them the meaning of

his suffering and death on the cross. Until this time, Jesus foretold the facts that he would suffer, die and rise again. But now, for the first time, he would explain its meaning. To Jesus' mind, all of God's history was culminating in this event. The historical background of the Passover would provide a basis for them to finally understand the meaning of his suffering and death on the cross. Jesus clearly said that the Passover finds its fulfillment in the kingdom of God. It looks forward to the wedding supper of the Lamb in heaven. There, Jesus and his bride—the sanctified, glorified church of Christ—will enjoy sweet fellowship forever in love and peace (Rev 19:7). This privilege is given to those who have a blood covenant with Jesus.

Third, the new covenant in Jesus' blood (17-23).

Look at verses 17-18. "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 clearly told them that this was his last meal before the kingdom of God came. At this moment, Jesus gave himself to them. Look at verse 19. "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.'" It is most interesting that at this Last Supper there was no roasted lamb for Jesus and the disciples to eat. There was bread and there was wine. But where was the lamb? Jesus himself was the Paschal Lamb at this Passover. John the Baptist had said, pointing to Jesus, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). When Jesus offered himself as the Lamb of God for the sin of the world it was once and for all for sinners. There is no longer a need for the symbol. There is no need to celebrate the Passover. Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed (1Cor 5:7b). Now we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Look at verse 19 again. "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.'" To Christians, Jesus' body is symbolized by bread. This reminds us of John 6:35. Jesus said, "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." After eating the paschal lamb, the Israelites set out on their pilgrimage. Jesus, the Bread of life, provides spiritual food for Christians on our holy pilgrimage to the kingdom of God. Jesus sacrificed his body on the cross for us. Spiritually speaking, his death renews our relationship with God so that we may eat the word of God as the Bread of life every day. Before eating the Bread of life that Jesus gives, all men are hungry and dissatisfied in their souls and cannot but live as restless wanderers on the earth with a sense of deadness and emptiness. But Jesus' body is the source of life and power to overcome the world and render glory to God. One senior shepherdess has suffered terribly through the persecution of someone close to her. The last two years have been almost unbearable. But she heard one word of God, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2Co 12:9). This word became the power source for her to overcome persecution and to overcome many practical challenges to establish an independent life. Just to survive has been remarkable and it is only God's grace. But something more is happening. God is using her to bear spiritual fruit by blessing her one-to-one Bible teaching ministry. With the word of God, she is turning adversity into the time of God's deep grace and fruitful victory. Indeed, the word of God is our power source to live a fruitful life of holy pilgrimage in this world.

Look at 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.'" The cup contained the fruit of the vine. Jesus said that this symbolizes his blood and marks the beginning of a new covenant. The old covenant was based on the law of God and the sacrificial system. This covenant was sealed in the blood of animals. It was necessary and a precursor of what was to come. But it lacked the power to really change men from the inside. When Jesus introduced the new covenant he must have been thinking of Jeremiah 31:31-34. 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.'" The old covenant failed to save his people. God kept his part of the old covenant with undying faithfulness. But his people could not keep their part. The power of sin in their hearts made them unfaithful to God. So they broke the covenant relationship. The new covenant is different. The new covenant is in Jesus' blood. Jesus' blood makes us truly one with God.

The blood of Jesus truly solves our sin problem. Leviticus 17:11b says, "...it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." God set the price for atonement as blood. Nothing less will do. We may apologize one million times. But in the end it seems to be empty words. Only blood can bring the satisfaction of God's righteousness. The wages of sin is death. No lesser payment will suffice. Still, the blood of animals cannot really satisfy God's righteousness for human sin. But Jesus' blood can. 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 the power to truly cleanse our consciences to the degree that we can stand before the living God as his servants. The blood of Jesus is the power source of our new covenant with God. In this new covenant our relationship with him is fully restored and we are "at one" with God. The blood of Jesus can cleanse any kind of dirty sinner and make him or her a new creation in Christ Jesus. There was a young lady who was under the power of sin. Though she was pretty, her inner conflict gave her an impression of a cloudy, rainy day. Then she accepted Jesus' blood of the covenant for the forgiveness of sins. Her conscience was cleansed and the power of sin was washed from her soul. She became beautiful both inside and outside. Later, she married a most gentle and kind man of God who may be a candidate to be the next Mr. Rogers. Their beautiful house church is one of the pillars of the Christian church as we enter the 21st century. It was established by the power of the blood of Jesus.

We must know the spiritual world. The power of sin is real and it can cause terrible destruction of human souls. There is nothing that can defeat the power of sin among the things of the world. So, when Judas rejected the blood of Jesus, there was no remedy. Look at verses 21-22. "But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him." Judas' end was terrible indeed. Driven by the power of darkness, he committed suicide. Finally he was sent to eternal punishment in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. He thought he was smart. He thought he was leaving his options open. But in the end he was the most tragic man who ever lived on the earth.

Only Jesus' blood can cleanse our souls and consciences from the power of sin and restore the holiness of God in our hearts. Only the blood of Jesus can bring us into a new covenant with God. Let's accept the blood of Christ and live as his holy children.