

Jesus Establishes a New Covenant in His 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 this passage, Luke describes the Last Supper. It was Jesus’ last meal with his disciples before he was betrayed to death. There is a strong pathos in this event; it left a deep impression on all participants. However, Jesus was not overcome by emotions. Jesus taught the meaning of his upcoming suffering and death. Jesus established a new covenant in his blood with his disciples, and all who would believe in him. This covenant is for us. As we consider its meaning, let’s accept it with faith and find salvation and life.

I. The tragedy of Judas Iscariot (1-6)

Verse 1 begins, **“Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching....”** The Passover was the most important date on the Jewish calendar; in fact, their calendar was formed around that date. It was an annual commemoration of God’s deliverance of their nation from bondage in Egypt. The Israelites had served as slaves for 430 long years (Ex 12:40, 41). Their lives were miserable. They had to work hard day and night and were beaten at random, with no remedy, no health care, and no vacation. They were even forced to drown their newborn sons in the Nile River; if they did not, they would be killed. Still, they were helpless. All they could do was groan and cry out. But God heard their cry and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God raised Moses as their deliverer and worked mighty acts of judgment against the Egyptians. Known as the Ten Plagues, these acts were a meting out of God’s justice. By God’s almighty power, the Israelites were delivered from bondage, and vindicated as human beings who had worth in God’s sight. Upon the basis of this mercy, God wanted the Israelites to form a holy nation and to serve him as a kingdom of priests. God commanded them to commemorate the Passover so they would remember his grace. They observed the Passover faithfully. By Jesus’ time, they had been doing so for some 1,400 years.

African Americans might compare the Passover to their own day of liberation from slavery. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation after the Civil War began. By his words, all slaves were set free. But it took more than words; it took blood. During his Second Inaugural Address,

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Lincoln acknowledged the blood shed on both sides of the war as God's just payment for our national sin against African Americans. Yet this was just the beginning. Civil liberties were won later, through the hard struggles of men like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The celebration of Dr. King's birthday is very important to our African American brothers and sisters.

As the Passover approached, the chief priests and teachers of the law should have been busy preparing. However, it had become a mere formality to them. Their hearts were occupied with hatred for Jesus, and their one concern was how to get rid of him. Though they had tried in many ways, they had failed every time. In fact, instead of discrediting Jesus, they had been revealing their own hypocrisy and evil--a great contrast to Jesus' love for God and people. Now the chief priests worried that people might abandon them altogether in favor of Jesus.

While the religious leaders were desperate, yet helpless, a force beyond the merely human intervened to enable an evil plan. Luke says in verse 3, **"Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve."** In a moment, Judas became as evil as Satan. Suddenly, he was capable of wickedness which he had never intended. He went to the Jewish leaders and plotted with them how he might betray Jesus. They gladly agreed to give Judas money in exchange for information that would lead to Jesus' secret arrest. The duplicity of the Jewish leaders reminds me of Michael Corleone in "The Godfather," who calmly attended his son's baptism as his henchmen systematically murdered his opponents. Yet the real question is how Judas could become the prey of Satan. The gospels expose his love of money. John calls him a "thief" for embezzling from the offering. Judas' love of money was exposed when he criticized a woman's heartfelt sacrifice for Jesus (Jn 12:6). Though Jesus rebuked him indirectly, he did not repent. He did not honor Jesus' words. Judas did not commit to Jesus. This made him vulnerable to Satan. After betraying Jesus, Judas hanged himself and went to eternal condemnation (Mt 26:24; 27:5).

Here we Christians must take warning. It is possible to be around Jesus and his ministry for an extended period of time and still fall into Satan's trap. It is possible to have special privileges from Jesus--such as being one of the Twelve, or the treasurer--and still fall into Satan's trap. We must not be complacent in regard to this dangerous enemy. We must pray every day, **"Lead us not into temptation"** (Lk 11:4b), and we must stand firm in our faith in Christ (1 Pet 5:9). Then God will give us victory (1 Pe 5:10).

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Moreover, in serving the young people of our times, we learn that we must fight a spiritual battle through prayer and the word of God. Recently a Rutgers University freshman was secretly videotaped by his roommate as he engaged in immoral behavior. The videotape was then broadcast to other students. The young man was so ashamed that he committed suicide, jumping off of a bridge. Another recent problem is “cyber-bullying,” which has driven some young students to suicide. Behind these events is Satan. Jesus called him a liar and murderer (Jn 8:44). He wants to destroy America’s youth. Only Jesus can give us victory. What American young people need most is not more freedom or more entertainment. They need Jesus, who alone gives victory over Satan. **Let’s fight a spiritual battle through prayer and the word of God for the youth of our nation.**

II. Jesus turns the Passover into the Lord’s Supper (7-23)

Verse 7 says, **“Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover Lamb had to be sacrificed.”** At the heart of the Passover celebration was the sacrifice of a lamb. Moses had instructed Israelite families to choose a year old lamb, without blemish or defect, and to let this lamb live with them. These cute little lambs endeared themselves to their hosts; some became like pets. But after a few days the family had to sacrifice their lamb. This must have made them think seriously about sin and its high cost. Then they put the blood of the lamb on the doorframes of their houses, and they roasted the meat over fire and ate it. On that first Passover night, the Lord went throughout Egypt, dispatching a destroying angel to kill the firstborn in every house as punishment for their sins. The firstborn in every house died, including Pharaoh’s firstborn son. The death of his son broke Pharaoh’s pride, and he set the Israelites free. But when the Lord saw blood on a house’s doorframe, he passed over that house, sparing all within it. This is why the event was called “The Passover.” The Israelites were spared because they put the blood of the lamb on their doorframes. It was God’s mercy. God wanted the Israelites to remember this event. So he commanded them to sacrifice lambs in Jerusalem annually. Thousands of lambs were sacrificed, one for each family, every year, like turkeys at Thanksgiving. Peter and John prepared the Passover Lamb this time. It was not a burdensome ritual, but a special privilege. As they watched the sacrifice of the lamb, they were better prepared to understand the meaning of Jesus’ death.

As we observe Jesus at the Last Supper, he is remarkably in control of himself and of the situation around him. There is no hint of stress. Rather Jesus is the picture of grace under pressure, of peace in the midst of a storm. It was because

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Jesus knew that God was in control of all things: Israel's history, his own life, and the lives of all who were around him. God was fulfilling through Jesus' life the events which the Passover had symbolized. God was doing so at precisely the time of the Passover. The juxtaposition of Jesus' imminent death on the Passover reveals God's sovereign rule over men and history. Jesus had faith in God's sovereign rule. So Jesus prepared and carried out the Passover celebration with great peace and assurance. Jesus worked with Peter and John to keep the meeting place secret. Jesus would not allow Satan to hinder his teaching at this time. The spiritual lessons Jesus was about to impart were vital. **Let's remember: God is in control, no matter how chaotic things seem. When we trust and obey Jesus we can be useful to God, like Peter and John were.**

The hour came to eat the Passover meal, and everything was ready. Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. Then Jesus shared his final teachings with them. Look at verse 15. **“And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’”** Here Jesus reveals his heart. He knows that suffering will come soon. Yet his heart is set on his disciples and he treasures time with them. Jesus loved his disciples dearly. He wanted to spend his final hours on earth with them. Yet, it was no time for trivial table talk. Jesus taught a most important lesson to them.

Look at verse 16. **“For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”** With these words, Jesus pronounced a transition in God's history. Until then, the Passover was a historical memorial of the Exodus. But its ultimate fulfillment was much greater. It was in the kingdom of God, that is, the restoration of God's reign in men's hearts and in the world. This would happen through Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. 1 Corinthians 5:7b says, **“For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.”** Thus, the Passover tells us the meaning of Jesus' sacrifice. As God broke Pharaoh's power through the Passover, God broke Satan's power through Jesus' death on the cross. God set captives free from Satan's grip and restored his rightful reign in our lives. Ultimately, the Passover looks forward to the great celebration in heaven, called the wedding supper of the Lamb. John envisioned this future event in Revelation 19:6-7. He said that a great number of redeemed people from all nations will shout: **“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come....”**

At the hour of his death, Jesus was full of hope in the kingdom of God. Jesus was thankful (17). Jesus anticipated God's great victory. From Jesus we learn to fix

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our eyes on the kingdom of God. Then we can have hope and victory and be thankful, even in adversity.

We find the key point of Jesus' teaching in verses 19-20. Through the Passover, Jesus explains the meaning of his death on the cross.

First, "This is my body given for you" (19). 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'"** (19). Jesus used the bread to symbolize his body. Very soon Jesus would be arrested, condemned and crucified. This was done at the hands of evil men. Nevertheless, it was precisely God's will, and Jesus' willing offering (Ac 2:23; Jn 10:18). Jesus gave his body for us. We can accept his body by accepting the bread he offers with faith. John's gospel helps us understand this more fully. In John 6:51 Jesus said, **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."** John does not record the sacramental Last Supper. Instead he emphasizes the importance of accepting Jesus' words. Jesus said in John 6:63b, **"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."** Peter accepted these words and received eternal life from Jesus. Judas did not accept these words and Jesus called him "a devil" (Jn 6:68-71). Jesus' words are our spiritual nutrients; they help us grow in God's image. Jesus' words inspire us with the wisdom of God; they lead us in the way of salvation. Jesus' words are the source of power which enable us to live holy lives. We are pilgrims traveling from the land of slavery to a promised land, from a world corrupted by sin to the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. We need provisions along the way; Jesus is all that we need. When we come to Jesus each day, we can participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (2 Pe 1:4).

Second, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (20). Next, Jesus took the cup. 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 declared that the time of the old covenant was over and the time of a new covenant had come. The old refers to the covenant made at Mt. Sinai, where the redeemed Israelites gathered after leaving Egypt. God gave them the Ten Commandments through Moses, promising that if they obeyed him fully he would treasure them and raise them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They said, **"Yes, we will obey,"** and Moses sprinkled the people with an animal's blood, saying, **"This is the blood of the covenant..."** (Ex 24:8). Then Moses and the

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elders of Israel had a fellowship meal with God. Afterward, Moses went up the mountain alone to receive instructions about the tabernacle. Before he could come back down the mountain the Israelites had set up a golden calf to worship, violating the covenant completely. They broke the old covenant. What was intended to be a source of blessing became a source of condemnation.

However, Jesus came to make a new covenant. Jeremiah 31:33-34 describes it like this: **“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...For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”** Simply speaking this covenant emphasizes the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and a transformation of the inner person. It implies the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us to change our desires and nature to make us obedient to God. St. Paul describes this covenant transition through the metaphor of marriage. Living under the law is like being married to a legalistic person, Mr. Law. Mr. Law never encourages, but dutifully points out weaknesses and faults until his partner is crushed. Living under the new covenant is like being married to a loving, gracious and compassionate person--Mr. Grace. Mr. Grace always supports, builds up and empowers, until his partner becomes beautiful in character, bears good fruit, and wins the final victory.

To make this new covenant possible, Jesus had to shed his blood on the cross as the Lamb of God. The historical image of the blood of a lamb has true significance in explaining Jesus' blood, but it just begins to tell the story. Jesus' blood is far greater in value and power than the blood of animals. First of all, Jesus was a man. A man's blood has greater value than that of an animal, for man is made in the image of God (Gen 9:6). Jesus was not just an ordinary man, Jesus was a perfect man. Jesus kept the whole law from the beginning of his life to the end. Uniquely among all people, Jesus deserved to live under the terms of the Old Covenant. But Jesus was more than a perfect man; Jesus was the God-man. Jesus is in very nature God. So his blood has value beyond our understanding. Jesus' blood has tremendous power, beyond any power known to man; it is infinite.

We need the power of Jesus' blood. The power of sin is too strong for us. It stains our souls so deeply that no human effort can uproot it. It makes our consciences guilty and condemns us to death. This is what drives many people to abuse alcohol and drugs and to engage in debauchery. But the blood of Jesus is more powerful than the power of sin. 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**

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that we may serve the living God!” The blood of Christ has the power to cleanse sin from our consciences. Jesus’ blood cleanses us so completely that we can stand in the presence of God. We can serve the living God. We can have an intimate love relationship with God. Jesus’ blood can change people from a culture like Sodom’s into holy children of God. When we receive Jesus’ words with faith, we can experience the power of his blood. Jesus’ blood brings us into a new covenant with the living God.

A covenant with God is not a light matter. As we accept God’s love and saving grace through Christ, we are entering a relationship with the living God. We are pledging to honor him as Savior and Lord. We are committing our lives to him. God has a purpose in this covenant. It is to use his people for his own glory. 1 Peter 2:9 explains this well. It says, **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** As we experience the blessing of God’s presence, God wants us to bring others into his light as well. God wants to liberate all peoples of the world from darkness and bring them into his kingdom. As covenant people we must keep God’s purpose at the forefront of our lives. This covenant was not just an individual matter, but a corporate matter. We are in covenant together as a body in Christ. We should regard one another as most precious, the ones for whom our beloved Lord Jesus shed his holy blood. We should love one another and learn to work together to carry out God's purpose for us.

Jesus told his disciples, **“Do this in remembrance of me.”** Jesus wanted them to remember his grace by celebrating the Lord’s Supper together. This is where holy communion originated. Communion is a means of grace by which we can receive Jesus and find the cleansing and restoration that we need to maintain our love relationship with God and with one another. Celebrating the Lord’s Supper is not a matter of ritual, but a matter of faith. According to Luke’s account, Judas was still present when the new covenant was instituted. But he did not accept Jesus’ covenant. When he did not commit to Jesus, he had no way to resist Satan’s power.

Today we have the opportunity to receive Jesus’ body and blood to cleanse our sins and bring us into a covenant of life with God. We can accept this covenant by taking communion. We can accept this covenant by receiving Jesus’ words. Let’s accept the new covenant in Jesus’ blood, the covenant of life. May God richly bless you.