

THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

Matthew 26:17-30

Key Verse: 26:28

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

In today's passage Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples. As they were eating, Jesus explained the meaning of his death on the cross. It was to forgive our sins. It was to make a blood covenant with us. Let's accept this blood covenant personally today.

First, Jesus deals with Judas' betrayal (17-25).

It was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus' disciples asked where he wanted to eat the Passover. In the past, Jesus' disciples usually waited for Jesus to tell them something. Unless Jesus told them to do something, they didn't do anything. But here, Jesus' disciples take the initiative in preparing the Passover. They are learning the serving mind of Jesus. Obviously, they had celebrated the Passover regularly in obedience to the law of God. According to the law, the Passover had to be eaten in Jerusalem (Dt 16:5-6). So they could not eat it in Bethany, where Mary and Martha lived. They asked Jesus where to go. Jesus' answer in verse 18 is rather cryptic. Jesus did not reveal a person or a place. Most likely, Jesus wanted keep it hidden from Judas, who was ready to betray him. Jesus wanted to eat his last meal with the disciples in peace; he had something important to teach them. The disciples did as Jesus had directed them. They trusted and obeyed him simply. The disciples have grown a lot as servants of Jesus.

The Passover was a major holy day. It commemorated God's great deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. Throughout Jerusalem, business had stopped, shops had closed. People were all at their homes reclining at tables, celebrating the Passover. It was a spiritual festival. Look at verse 20. “When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.” This time of intimate fellowship was precious to the disciples. Through fellowship like this, their hearts had often found healing and restoration as Jesus fed them and loved them. This time, however, was different. Jesus had to first deal with his betrayal. Look at verse 21. “While they were eating, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.’” Jesus' words shocked the disciples. It was not the first time Jesus had spoken of his betrayal. Jesus had spoken of it before, on at least two occasions (Mt 17:22; 20:18). Then, they had tried to ignore his words. However, now, for the first time, Jesus clearly foretold that one of his disciples would betray him. They could no longer ignore it; it had become very personal to them.

The disciples had been with Jesus for more than three years. They had suffered with him in many ways. They had shared great victories. They had fought with each other, and been rebuked together. They were a loyal community, like a patriotic anti-terrorist task force. One thing seemed sure to them. They would all follow Jesus to the end. When Jesus said one of them would betray him, it pierced their hearts like a knife. Look at verse 22. “They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’” Each of them looked into his own heart. They really did not want to betray Jesus. But they could not contradict Jesus' words. Each one could recall a moment of rebellion at the thought of the cross; betrayal was a real possibility. They questioned themselves, seeking Jesus' affirmation. Nevertheless, they acknowledge him as their Lord, revealing basic submission, even at this time.

How did Jesus answer? Look at verse 24. “The Son of Man will go just as it has been 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.” Jesus did not think of his betrayal from a human point of view. Jesus did not think his life was in the hands of the disciples, religious leaders or Roman soldiers. Jesus saw his life in the hand of God. Jesus would be betrayed according to the Scriptures. God was in control.

However, this did not excuse Judas for his actions. Judas' betrayal was a great sin against God. The consequences would be severe. Judas would suffer so much in remorse that he would take his own life, then go to everlasting torment. It would be better not to be born.

Though Judas' heart was full of evil, he said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He called Jesus, “Rabbi,” not “Lord.” He had never accepted the divinity of Jesus or the Lordship of Jesus. Judas thought he could manage his own life according to his benefit. But he was making a tragic mistake. Jesus told him plainly, “Yes, it is you.” Jesus wanted Judas to

know himself, that he was a betrayer. Even then he could repent and ask Jesus' forgiveness. But he did not. Jesus' heart must have been breaking. The pain of betrayal has paralyzed many a great leader. But Jesus was not paralyzed. Jesus dealt with Judas' betrayal in the wisdom of God. Jesus used it to fulfill God's world salvation purpose.

Second, the meaning of Jesus' body and blood (26-28).

Look at verse 26. "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'" Jesus had only hours remaining with his disciples. He really wanted to explain the meaning of his death on the cross. Jesus used physical symbols. He compared his body to bread. Bread nourishes our physical bodies and makes us healthy and strong. We need to eat bread several times a day, every day to maintain our strength and health. In the same way, our soul needs spiritual bread. This bread is Jesus himself. Jesus said in John 6:35, "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." Jesus also said in John 6:55, "For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink." Jesus is real; invisible, but real. When our souls feed on Jesus we find a spiritual life source. We find healing and spiritual strength. We can grow in the image of Jesus. We must feed on Jesus constantly. This is why we eat Daily Bread and pray regularly.

When Jesus said, "Take and eat; this is my body," he was giving himself to us out of love. Jesus was like a mother feeding her newborn baby, giving her life to make her child strong. For our part, we must take what Jesus gives. We must "take and eat." If someone bakes a loaf of homemade bread and puts it on the table in front of us, we can see it and smell it. But in order to eat it, we must reach out and take it and put it into our mouths. Likewise, we must take Jesus' body by an act of faith. We can do this through holy communion, and through meditating on the word of God, and through prayer. Jesus satisfies our souls and gives us joy and peace. We are truly content and feel that we lack nothing.

We live in a time of many kinds of addictions. Some are addicted to the internet. They hope that a steady stream of images and information will satisfy them. Some are addicted to chemical stimulants that send sensations through their bodies. Some people are addicted to pleasures of the flesh. They go from one thrill to another, from one sports season to another, from one casino to another. But nothing in the world can satisfy man's immortal soul. Only Jesus can satisfy our souls and give us real peace. Let's take and eat Jesus' body.

Look at verses 27-28. "Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" When Jesus died on the cross he shed his blood. Jesus gave his life for us. On January 11, Corporal James Dunham was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously. While serving in Iraq, Corporal Dunham threw his own body on an insurgent's grenade, shielding others from the blast. He died so that others could live. Jesus offered himself for us in a real act of sacrifice. Jesus really shed his blood and died on a cross. But Jesus' sacrifice is beyond compare with anyone else. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus' blood is holy and powerful. Jesus' blood has power to forgive sinners. Jesus' blood restores our relationship with God. Down through the generations, innumerable people who accepted the blood of Jesus have been saved from their sins and become holy children of God. They comprise a vast multitude from many tribes and nations. Jesus' blood is the power of God to save all who believe in him.

Through Jesus' blood we have a covenant with God. What is a covenant? It is a binding agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with the Israelites. Simply speaking, God promised to treat them as a treasured possession and bless them abundantly if they obeyed his words. However, they broke this covenant right after receiving it. The new covenant that Jesus makes with us is different. It is rather one-sided. Jesus promises to forgive our sins and make us God's children. We just need to believe. It does not depend on our works. It focuses on Jesus' sacrifice for us. Jeremiah 31:31-34 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.'" Through Jesus' blood, we receive the forgiveness of sins. Through Jesus' blood, we become God's children. Through Jesus' blood, we receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy

Spirit changes our minds and our hearts, filling us with the knowledge of God, love for God, and willingness to obey and serve God. Through Jesus' blood, we enjoy an everlasting love relationship with God. We can receive this blessing only by faith. Let's accept it today, without delay.

Third, Jesus' attitude during the Last Supper (26-30).

What was Jesus' attitude toward God at this time? First of all, Jesus was thankful. Two times, in verses 26 and 28, Jesus gives thanks to God. Jesus was not bitter or gloomy. Jesus was thankful. This was Jesus' basic attitude toward God. When Jesus offered five loaves and two fish to God, he thanked God (Mt 14:19). This thanksgiving is rooted in faith. Jesus believed God's love. Jesus believed God's good purpose. Jesus believed God's victory. Jesus believed God's world salvation plan would be accomplished, and that his disciples would be glorious men of God in the kingdom. Jesus teaches us how to be thankful always. St. Paul learned this attitude. When he was in a terrible storm at sea, he took bread and gave thanks to God and shared it with others (Ac 27:35). In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 Paul wrote, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." When we have a covenant with Jesus and everlasting salvation, we can be thankful in all circumstances. It is interesting that many traditional churches refer to the Lord's Supper as "the Eucharist." "Eucharist" means "giving thanks."

Secondly, Jesus had a burning hope in the kingdom of God. Look at verse 29. "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus saw the coming kingdom of God. Jesus saw the glorious scene of final victory. Jesus saw all of God's children gathered together with him in heaven having an exuberant celebration. Jesus saw his disciples there and anticipated the complete happiness they would share.

Thirdly, Jesus was joyful. Look at verse 30. "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." At the Mount of Olives Jesus would be betrayed. Jesus was marching into suffering and death. But Jesus was not sad or defeated. Jesus was joyful and victorious. Jesus sang a hymn. Jesus helped his disciples to sing together with him. Joy gave him strength to go to the cross. This joy was rooted in his faith. When we have Jesus in our hearts, we too can rejoice always.

The Lord's Supper was an intimate celebration for Jesus and his disciples. Jesus gave them his body and blood and they accepted it, making a covenant with Jesus. Intimate eating fellowship characterized their relationship. However, when the Lord's Supper was institutionalized, it came to be celebrated formally and habitually. The spirit and real meaning was lost (1 Cor 11:30-34). We must celebrate the Lord's Supper with prayer and sincere repentance. We must be aware of the Spirit's intimate presence. Then we can be blessed by this means of grace.

Today we especially learn the meaning of Jesus' blood shed for us. It was to forgive our sins. It was to make an everlasting love relationship with us. Let's accept Jesus' blood of the covenant by faith.