

“THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT”

Matthew 26:1-30

Key Verse: 26:28

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

Today’s passage covers one of the most painful, yet meaningful events in Jesus’ life and ministry. Jesus knew that he would be betrayed by one of his beloved disciples, arrested, tried and condemned to death. In fact, his betrayal had already begun, and Jesus was about to be arrested. Any ordinary person would have been crushed by this reality. But Jesus was not. Rather, he established a new covenant in his blood with his people. We can enter this covenant through faith as we celebrate communion. This is what Christians down through the generations have done. It is the proclamation of the gospel in action. Jesus tells us to preach the gospel both in words and in actions. Especially, the act of communion helps impress the gospel message upon us. Jesus told us to celebrate communion regularly. Why? We human beings easily forget God’s grace. It is a serious problem, a kind of spiritual dementia. Throughout Scripture we are told to remember God’s grace of salvation (Dt 15:15; 2Ti 2:8, et. Al.). Especially in this Easter season, it is vital that we reflect on Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection. Let’s remember Jesus’ grace as we celebrate communion today.

First, she has done a beautiful thing to me (1-13). During his passion week, Jesus gave his fifth and final great discourse in the book of Matthew. When it was finished, he said to his disciples: **“As you know, the Passover is two days away”** (1-2a). The Israelites had celebrated the Passover since the time of Moses. The law required all Israel to come to the Jerusalem temple annually for this. The word “Passover” means that God passed over the Israelites’ houses at the time of judgment when he saw the blood of a lamb on their doorframes. The total sacrifice of the paschal lamb was at the center of the Passover celebration. But since the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, the sacrifice of lambs ceased. When Jesus celebrated the Passover, he used bread as the symbol of his body, not the lamb. It is because he became the Paschal Lamb, offered once for all (1Co 5:7). This is why he said, **“...the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified”** (2b). Without Jesus we cannot understand the deep meaning of the Passover. Jesus wanted his disciples to realize that he was fulfilling the Passover.

“THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT”

At this monumental moment in God’s history, what were the religious leaders doing? The chief priests and elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest Caiaphas and schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him (4). Their deceitful and murderous spirit working behind the scenes was the manifestation of the devil himself. But they were afraid of the people, so they did not want to carry out their plot during the festival (5).

Jesus was in nearby Bethany, at the home of Simon the Leper (6). Simon must have been healed by Jesus and now he could host a dinner for Jesus. This reminds us that Jesus is the friend of sinners and he is willing to eat with those who invite him, remembering his grace. During the meal, a woman came to Jesus with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume. She poured it on his head as he was reclining at the table (7). For a woman in that society to do this was unthinkable. How could she do it? If she had been self-conscious, she could not do it. If she had calculated the cost, she could not do it. She could do this because she only thought about Jesus. Her eyes were fixed on Jesus. Most importantly, love for Jesus compelled her. Though she might have been unaware of it, her timing was impeccable; she did just what Jesus needed.

Though the perfume cost about a year’s wages (Mk 14:5), in the twinkle of an eye it was gone. The disciples were really surprised and became indignant. Immediately they criticized her, saying, “**Why this waste?**” (8) They reasoned that the perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor (9). Here we can see a great contrast between the woman and the disciples. The woman valued Jesus so highly that she could give her greatest treasure to him completely and without reservation. On the other hand, the disciples were concerned about the perfume and money. They did not see the beauty of a woman’s heart of worship given to Jesus. They did not realize that Jesus was worthy to receive such worship. Though John’s gospel said that Judas Iscariot criticized the woman, Matthew included all the disciples because they all had the same mindset. Honestly speaking, I have the same problem. We tend to see visible behavior from a pragmatic point of view. There are so many godly women around us who offer great sacrifices to Jesus behind the scenes. However, when men see this, we easily minimize it and become critical. Men, will you repent with me?

“THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT”

How did Jesus respond? As a man, Jesus must have been embarrassed. A woman had just expressed her adoration for him, and he had perfume dripping down his hair. His disciples behaved rudely toward the woman, and the meal seemed to be ruined. Surprisingly, Jesus first protected the woman, saying, **“Why are you bothering this woman! She has done a beautiful thing to me”** (10). In contrast to his disciples, Jesus saw her act as a beautiful thing. In what respect? She willingly offered her most treasured possession to Jesus as a pure act of worship. Her love for Jesus made her beautiful. Her sacrifice for Jesus made her beautiful. Her devotion to Jesus made her beautiful. The pouring out of her whole heart, not withholding anything, made her beautiful. To her, Jesus was everything. Yes, our pure acts to worship Jesus are indeed beautiful. When we use our money, time and energy to serve Jesus with our whole heart it is indeed beautiful.

Jesus went on to explain why the disciples’ argument was invalid and why the woman’s act was so beautiful. He said, **“The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial”** (11-12). Jesus accepted her act as the anointing for his burial. Jesus made her act part of his gospel history. He said, **“Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her”** (13). When we purely offer something to Jesus, we can be sure that he will accept it and use it in the best way, though we may not see how. For example, in 1886, a little girl named Hattie May Wiatt tried to enter a Sunday school, but was turned away for lack of room. She went home and told her parents that she wanted to save money for building a new church so that all children could be welcomed. They gave her odd jobs to do for one penny each. Soon, however, she died of an illness. Rev. Russell H. Conwell was asked to conduct the funeral. He learned that she had saved fifty-seven cents to offer for building a new church. He shared this story with the church elders. Soon the 57 pennies were sold for \$250, which became the start of a building fund. Eventually, it became enough to build a new church which later became Temple University in Philadelphia.¹ Whatever we offer to God with a pure heart of worship, God will surely use for his kingdom’s work. Let’s do beautiful things for Jesus and be beautiful people of God’s history!

¹ <https://www.truthorfiction.com/hattiemaywiatt/>

“THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT”

Second, “Drink from it, all of you” (14-30). In contrast to the woman’s beautiful act was the ugly betrayal of Judas Iscariot (14). He went to the chief priests and asked, **“What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?”** Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. What a terrible deal! He exchanged everlasting life and love for a few pieces of silver. Judas was deceived by the devil and became spiritually blind. Lord, help us not be like Judas.

The first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread came (17a). It was the day of preparation of the Passover. That evening, the Passover meal was eaten, family by family. Jesus and his disciples were a family. When the disciples asked where to prepare it, Jesus did not tell them exactly, to hide the location from Judas Iscariot (17b-19). Jesus was eager to observe the Passover with his disciples before his impending suffering (Lk 22:15). It is because Jesus wanted to explain the meaning of his death and establish communion. When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve (20). While they were eating, he said, **“Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me”** (21). Betrayal is one of the most painful human experiences. Anyone who knows it is coming will take decisive action against their betrayer. But Jesus did not. Why? He had accepted God’s sovereign will; a spirit of obedience ruled his heart, not emotion. Furthermore, he had mercy on his betrayer and gave him a chance to repent. At the same time, he prepared his disciples not to stumble when it happened.

The disciples were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, **“Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?”** (22) Jesus’ words struck each one personally and led them to search their own hearts. Each of them had a possibility to be a betrayer. This is a caution to each of us to honestly examine our hearts before Jesus’ words, which are the mirror of our souls. After they went through this process, Jesus replied, **“The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 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”** (23-24). Jesus confirmed that one of the Twelve would betray him. He did not indicate which one but gave a very solemn warning to help the betrayer repent. Jesus did not think of himself as a victim of betrayal. He knew that all this would happen according to the Scriptures; God was in control, not evil people. Still, the betrayer would be responsible for his action and suffer terrible consequences. Then Judas, the

“THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT”

one who would betray him, said, **“Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi!”** How could Judas lie so boldly? It is because he became the prey of Satan, who is the father of lies (Jn 8:44). Jesus answered very clearly, **“You have said so”** (25). It means, **“If only your words reflected your heart!”** Jesus loved him and helped him to repent to the end. John’s gospel indicates that at this moment Judas left (Jn 13:30).

Now, through the Passover meal, Jesus began to explain the meaning of his death on the cross. Let’s read verse 26. **“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’”** Jesus associated the bread with his body. Just as the bread was broken, so his body would be broken on the cross. Just as bread nourishes our physical bodies, so Jesus nourishes our souls. In John’s gospel Jesus explained, **“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty...Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you...for my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink”** (Jn 6:35,53,55). We human beings constantly seek something that can satisfy our deepest longing. But nothing in this world can satisfy us, be it money, human love, pleasure, success, achievements or fame. Only Jesus can give us true satisfaction, that comes through his divine peace and love. Let’s come to Jesus!

Shall we read verses 27-28? **“Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave 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.’”** Jesus related the cup to his blood. As drink was poured into the cup, so his blood would be poured out at the cross for the forgiveness of sins. Here we learn some important lessons. First of all, Jesus made a new covenant with his people. The words, **“This is my blood of the covenant,”** imply this new covenant (Lk 22:20). “Covenant” is a key word throughout the Scriptures. It refers to a relationship in which two parties commit themselves to each other. It is like a marriage covenant, in which a man and woman vow to love each other exclusively and to be faithful to each other until death. It is amazing that God—though he is the Almighty Creator, infinite, omnipresent and omniscient—limited himself and made a covenant with weak and finite human beings. “Covenant” is such a vast subject; we cannot explain it comprehensively in a short message. But simply speaking, there is the Mosaic

“THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT”

covenant, and the new covenant. The Mosaic covenant is conditional and hinges on man's obligation. It is characterized by God's words, **“You shall...you shall not....”** Perfect obedience leads to life and disobedience, no matter how small, leads to death. On the other hand, the new covenant of grace is based solely on God's faithfulness to keep his promise and stems from his unconditional love for mankind. It is characterized by God's words, **“I will...I will....”** It is God's one-sided promise of blessing. No one could keep the Mosaic covenant due to our sinful nature. So we were all doomed to death and judgment. But God had mercy on us and made a new covenant. Jesus fulfilled this new covenant completely on the cross and said, **“It is finished”** (Jn 19:30). Jesus paid it all. He forgives all our sins and enables us to come to God freely. God removes our sins as far as the east is from the west and remembers them no more (Ps 103:12; Heb 8:12). The problem is that sometimes we remember our sins. Then we suffer from guilt and condemnation. But we should believe that God has forgiven all our sins and remembers them no more and put our trust in him. Then we enjoy the blessings of the new covenant.

Another important characteristic of the new covenant is that it is sealed by Jesus' blood, while the old covenant was sealed by the blood of animals. In the old covenant, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place where God was present only one time a year, and he had to bring the blood of animals to offer for sin. This animal blood did not have power to wash away the sins of worshipers (Heb 9:7-10). It was only a shadow of what was to come. The reality was found in Jesus (Col 2:17). Jesus shed his blood once for all and sat down at the right hand of God (Heb 10:10,12). His blood is effective forever because he is the Son of living God and he lived a sinless life. His blood can cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God (Heb 9:14). His blood has power to break the chains of sin and death and set us free to live a new life. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, **“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 ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”** His blood is the permanent guarantee that we can enter his unshakable, everlasting kingdom (Heb 12:22-24,28). Thank you, Jesus, for this new covenant in your precious blood!

“THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT”

After establishing the new covenant, Jesus planted hope in the kingdom of God in the hearts of his disciples. He said, **“I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom”** (29). After finishing the Last Supper, they sung a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives (30).

Jesus said, **“Take and eat,”** and **“Drink from it, all of you.”** Jesus wants us to participate in his suffering and death by celebrating communion. It is how we can experience God’s sacrificial love and Jesus’ grace of forgiveness of sins tangibly. Our faith can be strengthened and our spirits renewed. We can be united as one body under our Lord Jesus Christ, though we are diverse in culture, ethnicity, and generation. As the united body of Christ, we can go through hardships, overcome temptations, and live blessed and fruitful lives. Let’s remember Jesus’ grace as we celebrate communion today.