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## Passion Scenes: The Lord's Supper

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TEXT: Mark 14:12-25 (ESV)

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

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Dear friends,

As Easter approaches, I thought it would be good for us to spend the next few weeks walking with Jesus through the story of His passion, meaning His suffering. I found it beneficial to look closely at those events. It reminds me of the depths of God's love for me. Jesus went through some terrible things for me and for you.

Today we begin with a look at the Last Supper. Some have entitled this passage "The Institution of the Lord's Supper. It took place on the first day of Unleavened Bread, which is also called the Festival of Passover. That was the annual time set aside when Israel would remember the key event of their history: God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. And the main part of the observance was a special meal. The meal commemorated the story of God rescuing the Hebrews. God had sent plagues after he responded to their cries for help to convince the pharaoh to let God's people go, but he wouldn't. Finally, God exercised His divine justice, and this justice would fall on everyone in the land. The angel of death was coming over every house. In every home, the firstborn would die under the wrath of His justice. The only way for the Israelites to escape this was to follow God's instructions. Each household was told to slaughter a lamb, put its blood on their doors as a sign of their relationship with God. It was an act of faith to do that, they were also to roast and eat the lamb for their meal that evening. Later that night, the angel of death did come. And sure enough, he passed over the homes of those who took shelter under this sacrifice, the blood of the lamb. But many Egyptians died, even the pharaoh's son died, which convinced him he had to let God's people go.

It was quite a rescue. Ever since that time, the Israelites were commanded by God to hold an annual celebration commemorating that rescue. They were to have a Passover meal using lamb and unleavened bread and wine and other things and have it in their homes as they told the Exodus story and ate the meal. Later on, it became a tradition for the people to make an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Heads of households would each bring a lamb to the temple as a special sacrificial blood offering. And after the lamb was slaughtered, it would be taken back to the homes in the city to be roasted and eaten as part of the Passover meal amongst the families.

So we find Jesus and His disciples in Jerusalem. It's Passover, the time it arrived for Him to carry out an even greater rescue. Jesus was greeted with great fanfare on Palm Sunday as he rode a donkey into the city like a king. And Judas, unknown to the others,

had already arranged to betray Jesus to the authorities who wanted to get rid of Him. Now, as visitors, Jesus and His disciples had no place in the city to have their Passover meal, so we find them asking Jesus, "Where can we go to prepare the Passover meal for you to eat?" And were they surprised to learn that Jesus had everything under control! He always did. He sent them out looking for a man carrying a jar of water who would take them to a home with a furnished upper room for them to use. And sure enough, it happened just as Jesus said – they were taken to the house, given use of the room, and they prepared the Passover meal, which they would celebrate after sundown. That evening, Jesus and the disciples came back to that house and celebrated the meal – the Passover. Jesus presided over it, like the head of a family would. Earlier in the meal, He had told them that one of them would betray Him, and that put a damper on the occasion, of course. They became upset at the thought of this, asking Him, "Is it me?" Jesus wasn't going to be telling them. He just moved on with the supper, back to conducting that supper with its special Passover ritual.

Well, Jesus went on to do a surprising thing near the middle of that meal. He departed from this Passover script. When it came time to bless the unleavened bread, called the Bread of Affliction, and bless the cup of wine and explain their significance, Jesus gave these elements a whole new meaning, pointing to Himself and what he was about to do. He took the bread, blessed it, gave thanks, gave it to them saying, "This is my body," meaning, "I'm going to be afflicted and suffer to deliver you from the bondage of sin and death." And He took a cup of wine and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them and they all drank from it and He spoke these words to them: "This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

What is this blood of the covenant that He's talking about? Well, back in those days when an oath was made, it was oftentimes marked with blood – animal blood – which would be sprinkled. It was a way of saying, "May what happened to this animal happen to me if I don't keep my word to you." This was called a covenant, kind of like signing a contract between two parties. So what Jesus is saying here is basically, "This is my blood, which will be spilled so that you may have a new covenant with God. The basis of this relationship will be my own blood." He follows that with these words, "Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." That's a very confident statement Jesus is making there. He's saying, "I'll accomplish my mission – I will rise again and be exalted, and I will drink of this wine again when all is said and done."

So Jesus is giving this meal a new meaning and also giving a major truth to them. Because by taking these elements of the Passover and pointing to himself, Jesus is claiming that all the earlier deliverances and earlier sacrifices, the lambs at Passover, were ultimately pointing to Himself. They were but previews of the greatest deliverance of all, God's rescue of the world from sin and death through the sacrifice of Jesus.

By the way, did you notice what is missing from this meal in this scene? Jesus departed from the script in another way. The main course is missing: the lamb. Where's the lamb? There appears to be no lamb in any of the stories of the Lord's Supper because the lamb was at the table. Jesus is the main course. As John the Baptist said of Him, "He's the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." As Prophet Isaiah said much earlier on, "He was one who was like a lamb led to slaughter on our behalf. All we, like sheep, have gone astray and the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all." That was what the Lamb of God did for us. For on the cross, Jesus got the punishment we deserved. He took the hit for our sin and guilt – the sin and guilt of the world fell upon Jesus. God loves us, but God is also a just God. And justice had to be exercised. Sin had to be paid for. Jesus took the divine justice for sin on Himself as a lamb of God so that we could be passed over forever and be saved. Jesus is our substitute sacrifice that we take refuge in.

Now, perhaps you're wondering at this point, "What does all this have to do with me?" Reading this story in February 2021: it's an interesting story, interesting history lesson on the origin of Holy Communion that we do in church, but so what? And here's my answer for you: first, the story paints for us a very lovely picture of a gracious savior who was willing to do it all for us and who is the same yesterday, today, and forever; who wants us to come to Him. We can trust Him as we look at what He went through for us. We know He loves us from this. And secondly, He still offers this meal to you and me today to bless us with His grace. It's a valuable gift that He has given us. It's meant to be treasured and appropriated and never taken for granted or treated casually. Christian author Walt Wangerin, reflecting on this story, writes, "In the night when His people betrayed him, the night of intensest enmity, the dear Lord Jesus said, 'This is my blood of the Covenant poured out for many,' ... then! Can we comprehend the joining of two such extremes, the good and the evil, together in the right night of gravest human treachery? Jesus gave the gift of Himself and the giving has never ceased. The Holy Communion continues today, for us."

Also, it's implied in Mark's gospel, but in Luke's version of the story, Jesus comes right out and says it. He says, "Do this in remembrance of me." Jesus wanted them to continue practicing this, to remember what He did for them at the cross. It's actually a command from Jesus to do this. Everyone who believes in Him is to eat the bread and drink the cup together with other believers. And later on, after the resurrection and ascension, the disciples remembered these words of Jesus and they obeyed. Thank God they remembered. This practice was called the Lord's Supper, and millions of people have been blessed by it ever since. It continues to this day to still be a wonderful gift of grace for the followers of Jesus. It's a personal gift. The bread is broken and given and eaten as a reminder of His body, broken on a cross for our sins, as we hear the words, "This is for you." Or the wine poured out to drink – the reminder of Christ's blood poured out on the cross for our sins. "This is the blood of Christ shed for you," we hear at the altar. It's a way of taking in the death of Christ for oneself and appropriating it personally for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus says to us, "Take it." Believe in what He's done for us. It's a gracious gift to be received continually throughout life as we follow Jesus. Martin Luther wrote of its blessings in his large catechism. He says,

Christ bids me to eat and drink in order that the sacrament may be mine, and a source of blessing to me as a sure pledge and sign. Indeed it's the very gift He has provided for me against my sins, death, and all evil. Therefore, it is appropriately called the food of the soul, since it nourishes and strengthens the new person.

And then Luther goes on to say, "The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken but grow continually stronger."

Jesus knew. He knew his disciples would need this in their lives, as they continued to follow and serve Him in this world. They would be facing temptations and hindrances that would cause them to stumble and fall into sin, to make them weary and ready to give up. So He provided this much-needed gift for their souls, for their faith. And Lord knows we still need this gift as well. I know I do. We still sin against Him: betraying Him, disobeying Him, turning to our own selfish ways. And we sorely need forgiveness. This is the perfect meal that's been given for sinners like me and you. It brings us forgiveness for sin. We also get afraid and lonely and tired along the way as we live in this broken world of ours and we feel a need to be touched by God's grace and love – we need to have Him draw near to us in a tangible way and not only hear Him say, but touch Him and taste Him as we hear "This is my body given for you. Take

and eat. This is my blood shed for you.” Jesus is present in that at the table. Christian author Max Lucado says it so well:

The Lord's Supper is a gift to you, the gift of Himself. It is the Lord's table you come to. It's the Lord's Supper you eat and drink. It's a holy invitation, a sacrament bidding you to leave the chores of everyday life and enter into His splendor. He will meet you at the table. And when the bread is broken, Christ breaks it. And when the wine is poured, Christ pours it. And when your burdens are lifted, it is because the king has drawn near.

Lee Eclov, who is a pastor, tells a wonderful story about the power of taking communion, the Lord's Supper. He said:

A young friend called me to say she admitted herself to a psychiatric hospital and while she was there, I visited her when I could. One of the visits was on Good Friday, so I asked her if she'd like for me to bring communion to her. She said she would and asked if some of the other hospitalized Christians could join us. On that spring afternoon, five or six of us gathered in her room and shared the sacred meal. I think it was the most meaningful Lord's Supper I ever shared. Half a dozen strangers, each scarred by heartache, sitting helpless in a locked ward. Yet Jesus was there, amongst His beloved. We were strengthened by His presence, we were healed in a way. We were nourished, washed and rejuvenated, all because we had communion.

All because we had communion!

Finally, we need this gift because it gives us a hope and confidence for the future, it gives us the big picture when we come to the table and eat and drink and hear the words. We not only remember what He did for us in the past and that He's with us in the present, but we also remember the promised future with him at the great banquet that awaits those of us who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. As this passage is telling us, “New in the kingdom, I'll drink it,” Jesus says, and it'll be with us. The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the feast to come with Jesus when He welcomes us home and takes us to Himself.

Now, when I was a boy, my mom used to stand on the front step of our house and I'd be out playing and every day at five o'clock she'd yell out, “Steve, supper's ready. Come and eat.” Friends, our savior has prepared a meal for us and he's saying the same thing today to you and to me. “Supper's ready. Come and eat, come and drink.” Amen.