“MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT”

Mark 14:12–26

Key Verse: 14:24

“‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them.”

 Today’s passage takes place on Thursday of Passion Week. In the evening Jesus eats the Passover meal with his disciples, and he uses the meal to explain the meaning of his death, which would happen the next day. The passage contains three parts: first is the preparations (12–16); second is the prediction of betrayal (17–21); third is the meaning of his body and blood (22–26). We especially want to think about what his words “My blood of the covenant” mean to us. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

1. Preparations (12–16)

Look at verse 12a. It’s the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Every year for a whole week in Jerusalem people gathered to celebrate this festival. God told his people to do this, to help them remember his grace of delivering them from slavery in Egypt. It was called the Festival of Unleavened Bread because during this time they had to get rid of all the yeast in their houses. It was to remind them of how they had to leave Egypt quickly, with no time to bake bread with yeast. Since yeast symbolized pride or wickedness, it also meant humbling oneself before God. They had to thoroughly get rid of all yeast for a whole week. It meant really sincere repentance. It’s still true: Only through sincere repentance can we renew God’s grace in our hearts. On this first day of the festival it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, in preparation to eat the Passover meal. This Passover lamb looked back to Egypt when God told the Israelites to put the blood of a lamb on their doorposts so that the angel of death would pass over their households, not striking down any firstborn sons there. The meal also had bitter herbs, to remember how bitter their slave lives had been. By eating a lamb at Passover, God wanted his people to remember how the blood of the lamb had saved them. But the Passover lamb also looked forward to Jesus (Jn1:29; 1Co5:7; 1Pe1:19; Rev5:12). Through his death Jesus himself became the Passover Lamb, who sets us free from a miserable life of slavery to sin.

 Look at verse 12b. The meal had to be eaten within the city walls of Jerusalem. Since the city became so crowded at Passover, it was not easy to find a place to eat the Passover meal. The disciples seem worried that they have no spot reserved, so they ask Jesus what to do. But Jesus has a plan. Read verses 13–15. This reminds us of some secret rendezvous in a spy movie. Men carried water in skins; only women carried water in jars. So to meet a man carrying a jar of water would be unusual. They are to say nothing to this man, but just follow him. When he takes them inside a house, then they are to talk to the owner. They are to tell him, “The Teacher asks, ‘Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’” Obviously it would have to be a room large enough to fit them all. And this homeowner evidently is a supporter of Jesus. Jesus probably had made arrangements with this man earlier, so he says, “He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” The room would have carpeting on the floor, and tables and reclining couches, as well as a place for cooking the lamb, roasting the vegetables and serving the wine. Once they find the place, the two disciples are to start cooking the meal. Why all the secrecy? Jesus knows the Jewish religious leaders are looking for a way to arrest him secretly and kill him. He doesn't want to be interrupted during this meal. He wants to use these last hours with his disciples to explain some very important things.

 How do they respond? Look at verse 16. It’s similar to when he sent the two disciples to get a baby donkey for him to ride on into Jerusalem. It again reminds us that Jesus is in control of everything. And it again shows how he has to depend on the support of his followers. He has no means to host such a feast for himself and his twelve disciples. It also shows how he repeatedly trains his disciples. The training is to just take him at his word, trust and obey him. It’s very practical faith, because they actually have no place to eat the Passover. Though they don’t understand, when they just trust and obey Jesus, they end up having all that they need. This is a lesson we still need, again and again. We may worry about many things. But if we trust and obey Jesus, everything turns out fine.

1. Betrayal (17–21)

Look at verse 17. It must have been a happy moment. At last they could be alone together in this upper room, eating the Passover meal. Passover had a specific order that got more elaborate over time. In any case, people would find their places at the table, and the family leader would pronounce a Passover blessing, first on the festival and then on the wine. Everyone would probably drink from the one cup. Then the food would be brought in. The meal consisted of unleavened bread, bitter herbs, greens, stewed fruit and roast lamb. Someone, usually a child, would ask why this night was different from other nights. Then the leader would tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Everyone would praise God for his salvation and begin singing Psalms 113–115. Then everyone would have a second drink of wine. Then the leader would take bread, bless it, break it and give it to everyone at the table. He would say, “This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt.” People would dip their bread into the bitter herbs and stewed fruit, and then start eating the meal. When everyone finished, the leader would bless the wine a third time with a prayer of thanksgiving, and people would take a drink. People would sing Psalms 116–118, have a fourth drink of wine, and finish the meal.

But at this Passover meal, things would be quite different. Read verse 18. Jesus’ prediction changes the whole mood. One of the Twelve would betray him. Jesus emphasizes that it would be one eating with him. How do they respond? Read verse 19. They all start grieving. It’s no longer enjoyable to eat this meal. They each ask the same question, “Surely you don’t mean me?” Partly it shows their love for Jesus, but also partly, their self-doubt. Judas says it along with the others, like a good actor. But Jesus insists. Read verse 20. It’s most tragic that one of Jesus’ closest followers, someone who shared his bread, would betray him. Jesus must be thinking here of Psalm 41:9: “Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.” He goes on. Read verse 21. Jesus is saying here that it doesn’t have to be Judas. Jesus will be rejected, suffer and die in fulfillment of all the prophecies anyway. He’s warning Judas to repent, before it’s too late. The Bible warns us elsewhere about this sin of betraying Jesus. It’s not hard for God to forgive, but after betraying Jesus it’s so hard for us to repent. Hebrews 6:4–6 reads, “It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.” The Bible tells us to be faithful to Jesus, even to the point of death (Rev2:10b). Jesus’ warning is not just for Judas but for all of us. How might we betray Jesus today? It’s not just if we turn away from him, but if we deny the truth of who he is, if we join with people who are mocking, insulting and crucifying him by their behavior today. We betray him if we’re ashamed of him and his words in this adulterous and sinful generation (8:38). We betray him if we betray those who believe in him (cf. Ac9:4,5). How can we avoid doing this?

1. My body and my blood (22–26)

At this Passover meal Jesus says something even more radical. Read verse 22. The bread no longer represents the bread of affliction in Egypt; it represents Jesus’ body. As the bread was broken, Jesus’ own body would be broken on the cross. Giving his body means giving his own life. “This is my body” means Jesus would die. And each of them taking a piece of it meant each of them accepting that Jesus died for him. As we accept the death of Jesus for our sins, we come into true spiritual fellowship with one another. It makes us all true brothers and sisters in Christ.

 Read verses 23,24. Jesus says the Passover wine represents his blood, which would be poured out for many. He calls it his “blood of the covenant.” Actually Moses first used these words when the Israelites promised to obey all God’s words, and when he sprinkled them with all with the blood of a bull. It was a confirmation of God’s covenant with them. But the Israelites broke that covenant very soon when they worshiped the golden calf, and later, again and again, when they disobeyed God in so many ways. Centuries later the prophet Jeremiah said God would make a new covenant with his people (Jer31:31–34). It looked forward to this covenant in Jesus’ blood. God’s covenant with us in Jesus’ blood is to forgive all our wickedness and not to remember any of our sins anymore. This covenant actually enables us to know the Lord personally. It gives us a new mind and heart that actually loves God’s word instead of always looking for loopholes. In short, God’s covenant in Jesus’ blood truly changes people.

What does “my blood of the covenant” mean to us? When Jesus poured out his blood, he poured out his life for us (Isa53:12). When he poured out his blood, he ransomed us (10:45). Through his blood we belong to God (Ac20:28; Rev5:9). Through his blood we become members of God’s eternal kingdom (Heb9:11–28; cf. Col1:13,14). Through his blood we’re justified (Ro5:9). Through his blood we have confidence to come into God’s holy presence (Heb10:19). Through his blood we’re freed from our sins (Rev1:5). Through his blood we’re made holy (Heb13:12). Through his blood our guilty consciences are cleansed (Heb9:14). Through his blood we’re brought near, near to God and near to one another (Eph2:13). Through his blood we have peace with God and peace with one another (Col1:20). Through his blood we have fellowship with one another and are purified from all sin (1Jn1:7). Through his blood we’re redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to us from our ancestors (1Pe1:18,19). Through his blood we have victory over the devil and all his accusations (Rev12:10,11).

Why do we need this blood covenant with Jesus? Without it, we’re depending on ourselves, on our own efforts, passion and zeal, on our own righteousness. Up to this point, all the disciples were actually doing this. Only if they accepted Jesus’ blood of the covenant could they truly follow Jesus, even unto death. When we accept Jesus’ blood of the covenant, we’re actually depending on Jesus, not on ourselves. We need to receive this covenant in Jesus’ blood by faith (Ro3:25a). Read verse 24 again. What else does Jesus say? Look at verse 25. Here he points his disciples and us to the hope of the heavenly kingdom, where only by his grace we're invited to join in the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev19:9).

May God bless you to have a personal blood covenant with Jesus. Through this blood covenant may God bless each of us to serve him faithfully.