

The Last Meal

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[0 : 00] For those of you who are visiting today, as I said, we've been going through Mark's Gospel and Mark said, Great Gospel, it's a high-speed Gospel, it's fast, he's moving from one subject to another all the time, we'll even see that a little bit today, but it starts off with this phrase, this is the beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And that's really what the Bible, or that's what the Gospel of Mark is all about. He says it out at the very beginning, that's his theme, we meet together in the name of Jesus Christ today, we worship in the name of Jesus Christ, Sophie will be back, ties into the name of Jesus Christ, and so even at that kind of most basic level, it's a very relevant subject for us to be looking at today in our worship.

So Mark went to write this Gospel because he wanted to tell the early church and the church since, the early church about Jesus Christ. He had been transformed, his whole life had been transformed by coming to know and meet with and trusting Jesus Christ as his saviour.

The early church had come to know Jesus in that way and they needed to know more about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit inspired him to write what became one of the Gospels in the New Testament.

And in this chapter, like all the Gospels, it's kind of really heavily weighted towards the last few days and minutes and days and weeks of Jesus' life. It's not like a normal biography that spends ages at different sections of, or each of the sections of somebody's life, it's really focused on this last week of Jesus.

[1 : 45] A lot of the Gospels are focused, at least a third or almost a half sometimes are focused on this last week of Jesus' life because it's so important to his ministry and to his mission.

So here we are at the last few days of Jesus' life and he's instituting a very famous meal, if you're part of the church, then you know that the Lord's Supper that was instituted, that was begun here by Jesus, it's a very famous meal.

A very famous meal, not just for Mark to record here, but it's also a very famous meal. You'll need to come back in later. I'm only joking. But yeah, it's a very famous meal because it has continued to be, sorry, a famous meal for the church.

It's a meal that Jesus instituted for the church to remember his death on the cross. And it continues to be throughout the world a hugely significant spiritual symbolic meal for the church.

It's a sign and a seal of faith. It's a sign of what Jesus has come to, a visual sign. And it appeals to our senses. And so we have the Lord's Supper, which appeals to our senses.

[3 : 04] I'll go on and speak a little bit more about it. And also baptism as well, which appeals to our senses. It's a very visual thing, which God has given us to tell us, remind us of spiritual truths, to be a sign for us towards Jesus and our faith in Jesus.

And a seal that's there to encourage and help us and build us up in our faith. So it's very much, this institution of the Lord's Supper is very much important, very significant and important for the church right throughout history and the church throughout the world will celebrate the Lord's Supper today and in different days of the church calendar.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul kind of founds what Jesus has done here by giving another institution of the Lord's Supper. So I want to speak about that for a few moments and also speak about baptism for a few moments this morning.

So this Lord's Supper, which we've read about here, it's very much rooted in an Old Testament meal. It's rooted in an Old Testament meal that Passover and Jesus is meeting here to meet with the disciples to celebrate the sacrifice of the Passover lamb.

So it's rooted in the Old Testament. So that's quite important. And very often Mark does that and we've seen that in our studies so far, that Mark kind of roots what he says back into the Old Testament.

[4 : 36] Sometimes because his readers would have known what he was talking about, but also because he wants to make a link. He's saying it's not just, you don't just forget about the Old Testament now, because the Old Testament is pointing forward to Jesus and to the coming of Jesus.

And lots of the things that happened in the Old Testament, we're preparing for that and lots of the symbols and religious celebrations and rituals of the Old Testament were pointing towards Jesus coming.

So Mark is doing what he's done quite a lot. He's connecting the Old Testament to what Jesus is doing now and what Jesus then goes on to do. And that's very important.

And what he's also doing, and if you've been here over these last few weeks, I hope you'll remember this, is that Jesus is realigning, sorry, not Jesus, Mark is realigning our thinking about Jesus. What he sometimes does is he sometimes visually or verbally, or as we read the word, he kind of shakes us.

And he says, wait a minute, this is what Jesus is like, it's not what you think. And he's sometimes just presenting quite a radical picture of Jesus that makes us think again.

[5 : 47] Because sometimes we've got a kind of little picture of what we think Jesus should look like or be like. And Mark is saying, no, this is what he is actually like. So very often we find Mark is wanting to realign our thinking about Jesus to a historical factual presentation of Jesus.

And he's also wanting to realign our thinking about ourselves as God sees us, so that we see ourselves maybe differently from what we do ordinarily. So there's that kind of thing going on, Old Testament link and realignment of our thinking.

So there's Passover meal. And that Passover meal was remembering something that happened way back near the beginning of the Old Testament. And some of you will know that story. If you know the stories of the Old Testament, if you know the Bible, you'll know the stories.

Some of you may not know the story, but it's the story of God's people in the Old Testament who ended up, that's a long story I'm not going to go into, ended up in slavery in Egypt. So they ended up enslaved in Egypt and undergoing real oppression.

And you know the story of Moses was there, and it was Pharaoh, and Pharaoh wouldn't let the people go, and you know, I will not let the people go. And there's been various songs written about that and all kinds of things have been said.

[7 : 09] And eventually God brings judgment on the whole situation. He says, can't go on anymore. And this people must be allowed out, must be given their freedom.

And so he ordains the last and the terrible plague of judgment on the people of Egypt because they will not let the slaves go.

And that is the destruction of the firstborn. But what he does for his own people who are in Egypt, he says if they kill the Passover lamb, this one year old lamb, lamb without defect, shed its blood, put the blood on the door lintels, and the angel of death would pass them by.

So the eldest child would not be under God's judgment in that way. And they would be set free. And we know the story of the Red Sea and then going into Promised Land in 40 years in the desert and all these things that went on.

So from time after that, time to time after that, the people remembered once a year this freedom, this release that God won for his people by slaughtering this Passover lamb.

[8 : 22] And this Passover meal was a reminder of being taken from slavery to freedom. God's judgment, a substitute in their place, the sharing of blood, and an unblemished lamb.

And that is the Old Testament story. And lots of pictures are in that story, lots of symbols. That's a real story. And what Jesus is doing here is he's taking that Old Testament story and he's applying it to himself.

He's applying it to himself. He's going to be the one who's going to be the lamb as it were. And lots of pictures. And if you remember from John's Gospel, when John his cousin, John the Baptist, when he first saw Jesus coming onto the scene, he said, Behold! Or he said, Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That was kind of linking into this story.

And so Jesus is taking this Old Testament Passover and he's instituting a new memorial service, a new memorial meal, which is going to be for the church in the New Testament and right up to ourselves and forward, which we're remembering not an Old Testament story, but we're remembering a New Testament story, a New Testament deliverance from slavery, a New Testament sacrifice on our behalf.

And it's that whole picture where Jesus wants us to know that without the shedding of blood, there's no forgiveness of sin. And also greater love is no man than this. They lay down his life for his friends.

[10 : 04] And he's beginning to unpack for his disciples and for the church this reality that he has come to do this very significant, huge, horrific, amazing sacrificial death on the cross for humanity, for people to be set free spiritually. And that's what he's doing here.

He's using an Old Testament picture because all of that was pointing for all the kind of sacrifice of the Old Testament. It's simply pointing forward to sacrifice of God, of Jesus on the cross.

And he's pointing forward to that and he's there for going on to say, this will be remembered. You're to remember me every time you participate in this. And it's not a Passover lamb this time.

It's bread and wine. And that's what we use to remember Jesus. You know, he says, this is my body, which is for you. I'm going to say a little bit about that. So we have this meal. Okay. We're getting there.

And what we notice about this meal, one or two things, it's a good, it's a three course meal, which is always good. There's a surprising and a shocking starter to this three course meal.

[11 : 20] And some of what we see here, but some of it's in another gospel, because if you remember what I said about Mark, is he's really fast moving. He just, he gives us just the bare essentials of the story.

And so sometimes we find, if we go to the other gospels, we find a little bit more about the story. Mark's going through it quickly. In John's gospel, you find a really quite a long section about what happens in the upper room.

And it begins with a really surprising and shocking beginning is that Jesus, the master, as it were, the leader of his people here, he gets on his knees and he washes the disciples feet. So that's a really shocking beginning to the meal, because that didn't happen in that culture. Simply, it wasn't the done thing.

And that Jesus was giving them, he's saying, this is how I want it to be. I want you to be leaders, but I want you to be servants. I want you to be able to do the most menial of tasks as a follower of Jesus, because that's what I am doing.

And it's the Son of God, He's God in the flesh, and He's come to do this amazing thing to dine across for our sins. And yet He's also willing to be a servant to wash the disciples feet. It's a hugely awkward moment.

[12 : 34] The disciples are kind of really uneasy. What's He doing? He's not supposed to do that. It would be a bit like the dean of the faculty, for all of you students, or the managing director, or the chief executive officer.

He'd be taking a baggy or dirty washing home, dirty washing of your underpants, home to clean. It's a bit like that. You feel really uneasy about that. And yet that's what Jesus is, He's breaking preconceptions here. He's saying, yes, I'm a leader, yes, I'm your Lord, I'm your God, but I am a servant leader, and I will serve in the most menial of ways.

So it's a really awkward beginning to the meal. We don't see it in Mark's Gospel. But Mark, he also enters into the awkwardness of the meal, because we see and we recognize that there's something not normal about this meal. So Jesus washed their feet and then they reclined at the table.

Now it's not like a table that some of you will go down to afterwards who are connected with the baptism. You'll have your feet under the table, you'll be on a seat, and it'll be kind of normal, I hope. But in Jesus' time, it was more like they were reclining. So you'd recline on your elbow, your body would be, you kind of lying out on the floor. It would be a very low table, maybe just about a foot high.

It would probably have been a triclinium, which is a three sided table. So they were kind of, their legs, their bodies facing out of the way.

[14 : 01] It would be a bit like a kind of star going out like that. So that's the kind of meal it would have been. And Jesus, as they reclined, he drops a bombshell to the whole group, which if the washing of feet was bad enough, it is worse. Jesus says someone here is going to betray me. Someone's going to betray me.

And that's not the best kind of opening gambit for a host to make a meal, is it? That's not what you, it's social etiquette about putting people at the meal, putting people at ease when they come to your house for a meal.

One of you here is going to betray me to death. It's not the thing that you would expect. And it is, it's completely awkward and it makes the situation in the meal a really uncomfortable meal.

But what Mark is doing is also reminding us that Jesus is in absolute control of the situation. He's instituting this himself. He's instituting it for the whole church.

He's prepared the room. Someone knew about it. It was going to happen. He's done the feet washing because he wanted to do that. And he is now saying, look, I know Eliza head. I know I've come to Jerusalem to do.

[15 : 13] And I know one of you is going to betray me. And I know what's going to happen in the future about that. So Mark is really reminding us of who God Jesus is here.

That he's in control of the situation, but the disciples are horrified. And it's made worse by him saying, well, it's whoever dips the bread in with me. And probably all of them would have done that because that was a sign of hospitality.

And it was a horrendous thing to abuse someone's hospitality by betraying them. That made it even worse. No, they're actually going to dip the bread in with me here.

When he dips bread into the bowl with me. So it's a huge look of attention. There's a lot of attention in here. You think about this situation and I just want to say that in all with all the love I can muster.

Sometimes I think we need to remind ourselves that there's no messing with Jesus. There's no messing with him. Kind of we've made him a bit of a sappy soft insignificant character, haven't we sometimes.

[16 : 23] And it's easy for us to have lost sight of his power and his authority and his dignity and his importance. And of what he's come to do. We kind of made him a Mickey Mouse figure in many ways.

But he's reminding us as he's reminding the disciples, he says, I know your hearts. I know you, because I met you. I know you and I one day I'll meet you at one day.

And he encourages the self examination of our lives and our hearts. And for me and for us as Christians here, we've come to that place where we've had the light of Jesus Christ expose the darkness that's in our own hearts and it's forced us to go to him and say, look, I'm sorry.

I need your forgiveness and I need your grace. And he loves that. That's what he wants from us. But he, he, there's no messing with him at that point and at that level because he knows who we are.

And he wants us to believe in him and trust in him and to believe this good news. He doesn't want us to betray him. Absolutely not. He's again here. He's given Judas who we know went on to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

[17 : 35] He's given Judas this last opportunity. He's saying, look, I know Judas. Come on, man. I know. Change. Come back. It's still not too late. It's better for you not to have been born if you go down this road that you're going down.

And that's true for us. That's true for us today. Still better for us not to have been born. But all the solemnity of that statement, if we betray, turn our backs and ignore or reject Jesus.

So there's that strange start to the meal, you know, surprising and shocking start. But there's also a surprising and a shocking main course which we've mentioned before, which is Jesus takes this Old Testament symbolism of the Passover lamb.

And there was lots of different things involved in that Passover, herbs and honey and various different things. But here he just takes the bread and the wine and he says, look, forget about the Passover lamb of the Old Testament and see this bread and this wine.

Take them and recognize that they are going to be symptomatic of me. You know, he says, take it. This is my body when he gives them the bread and he took the cup, offered it, gave thanks, they drank for it. This is the blood of the Covenant which is poured out for many.

[18 : 47] Tell the truth. I will not drink it by again until the fruit of the vine until that day I drink it in unicogynia. I drink it in unicogynia, the kingdom of God. So Jesus is taking this, he's taking this as a symbol of what he's going to do on the cross.

His blood is going to be shed, his body is going to be broken in death. He knows the crucifixion lies ahead. He knows that because that's where he's going. That's the direction he's headed in.

He's deliberately set his face because that's where he's going to be the sacrifice for the sins of his people. Where he's going to satisfy divine justice and he's going to, in his love, lay down his life having lived a perfect life and then died the death that we deserve.

That's what makes him our redeemer, that's what makes him our saviour. And it's hugely again uncomfortable, it's probably very uncomfortable for us in many ways. It must have been hugely uncomfortable for the disciples.

They didn't think that's what he was going to be. They thought he was going to be a kind of earthly king who would kick out the Romans and have a big army and they would all be sitting beside him in a new Jerusalem or whatever it was that they had dreamed up.

[19 : 52] But it was horrible talk for them. Uncomfortable talk for the Jews, particularly this whole idea of blood. Blood was sacred. Blood, they knew had the life in it. They knew that God used it as the means of atoning for sin and sacrifice of animals in the Old Testament.

But they didn't think it was going to apply to Jesus. They're master, they're lord, they're God. It was sacred. There was no black puddings for the Jews. They didn't eat. They didn't participate in anything like that.

And yet here Jesus has given them a symbol, a picture, and say, it's not literally you're not going to do that, but you're going to remember me when you take of the bread and the wine. That's going to remind you of what I've done on your behalf.

So the Lord Supper, which is being instituted here, is a real reminder of the centrality. That Jesus, this is not, the church hasn't done this. This is what Jesus wants us to remember.

This is the important part. He doesn't have a great deal of time, or he doesn't have any kind of sacrament that he set aside to remember his birth. To remember his coming of age or coming 21 or whatever else.

[20 : 59] His death is significant, and that's where the gospel spends so much time on that last week. And he's saying this is because this is my way of opening up heaven and forgiveness and hope in a future to my people who have turned their backs on me.

This is God's way. It's God's love. It's God's answer to our own sin and badness and wrong thoughts and hatred of God. It's God's answer to our own death, which he says the sting of it can be removed and we can go and live with him forever in heaven.

And it continues to be the answer, the good news of the gospel. So that's surprising and shocking main course. But then there's also very briefly a surprising and beautiful dessert in this meal that Jesus is providing.

Verse 25, he says, it's the blood of my crowning, and then he says, I tell you the truth, I will not drink it again, I drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.

And he's reminding us in all the kind of solemnity of that moment and the darkness that he's going on to face and the depression of his disciples who don't know what's happening and the strange meals being instituted by him.

[22 : 12] He says, look, I know what I'm doing. I'm in control of the situation. I know he's going to betray me. I'm allowing that to happen because I need to go to the cross. But I will not remain under the power of death.

I will die and on the third day I will be raised again, which takes us off to Easter Sunday, of course. But he says, I will come through this. I know what I'm doing. There's purpose, real purposeful, purposeful mess.

Is that a word? It's real purposeful. What Jesus is doing here. And he knows there's a victory. He's going to die. He's going to die on the cross. But on the third day he will be raised again, victorious over death, triumphant over death, so that everyone who trusts in him will also be triumphant over death.

The reason for our death will have been dealt with by Jesus on the cross. And if we trust in him, we can know forgiveness and hope and a future in Christ. And so he speaks about this future where he will drink of the fruit of the vine and you and the kingdom of God.

And speaks about heaven and the future beyond this life, the future beyond this brokenness and this pain and the suffering that so often we know and experience here and now.

[23 : 27] And the Bible's imagery, the pictures the Bible gives of heaven is always really positive. You know, we've grown up thinking heaven is really boring.

It's hanging around in clouds, playing harps and stuff. But the Bible doesn't give that. The Bible gives great imagery of something physical and real and beautiful like a feast and like the drinking of wine and a celebration, like a marriage celebration.

A place where beyond our wildest dreams, a place of perfect joy with Jesus Christ and his life and the beauty of his life at the very centre of it where we will worship him and know life to the full.

There's a song someone wrote and sung famously, I think it was by Queen, said who wants to live forever?

Not in this life, but it's brokenness and pain and aging and weakness that goes with it. But in that kind of life, the newness that he offers, the hope and the future.

[24 : 36] So will we? Do you want to be part of that? Well, John and Kim are both part of that because they've taken Jesus Christ to be their saviour.

Dave and Sue, who will have Bobby baptised next week. They've also grabbed the hold of this life that Jesus offers and they're part of it.

And they, like us, are sinners saved by grace, saved by what God has done for us. Not because of anything in ourselves, simply because of who he is, because he chose to love to such a degree and offer his grace fully and freely to us and it is the most wonderful of things.

So he set in place the Lord's Supper, but he also set in place baptism. It's the other sign and seal that Jesus set in place for his church.

Symbols, pictures, visual representations of what he had done and he has done and they both represent slightly different parts of his work, but the same core truth.

[25 : 57] And baptism symbolising our union with Christ is kind of our badge of belonging to Jesus. And the immersion in water or the pouring of water, the sprinkling of water representing the cleansing work of Jesus, cleaning us on the inside, this outward symbol of the water and also the pouring of the Holy Spirit into our hearts by faith as we believe in him.

So baptism is the other great ordinance that Jesus has instituted for his church. And it too mirrors the Old Testament, it goes back into the Old Testament, takes from the Old Testament for ourselves.

Just as the Passover becomes the Lord's Supper, so we recognise that there's one covenant of grace. There's only one way to be right with God, there's only one way to be accepted by God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament before Jesus and after Jesus.

Everyone in the Old Testament was just looking forward to what Jesus would do. Everyone from Jesus is looking back to what he's done, so he's central to it. So much so that this covenant which Jesus says he's instituting here, he says this is the covenant.

In my blood, this is the blood of the covenant poured out from him, the covenant, the strong word that he uses. Covenant goes right back to Abraham, where Abraham is the believer, sorry, Abraham is the father of all who believe by faith in the Old and in the New Testament.

[27 : 35] He was justified by faith in Jesus Christ that he didn't know about, but he looked forward to just as much as we are. And that covenant that God entered into with Abraham, of which he's the father of all believers, is a covenant that's made new in Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

The Old Testament points towards it, but it's still the same covenant ultimately, renewed in the New Testament. And in that Old Testament, the sign of belonging to that covenant was circumcision.

It was given to males and to the infant males. And the infant males before they came to faith in what God was doing for them.

And the New Testament is brought into all the children of believers. And that covenantal language given to Abraham is also given in Pentecost, very similar language.

The promise is to you and your children and to all who are far off. So we recognise the unity and also the difference between the Old and the New Testament and the covenant and the signs of the covenant, the baptism being that sign.

[28 : 52] And the focus is really on the reality of the parental faith, the faith of the parents, the sign of the covenant given to believers and to their children.

And that is because God so often chooses to work through families and chooses to progress his gospel through families.

It's the foundational way of growing the kingdom. It's the community of grace of which it's a privilege and a responsibility and a challenge, both for parents and for children.

And in the Great Commission that Jesus gives to the church at the end of Matthew, he says, go teach, baptise and teach. And teaching is such an important part of this covenantal responsibility that we train up our children in the way that they should go.

We tell them, we encourage them. We give them an example that we live what we are. We try to be not hypocritical. We try and live what we believe.

[29 : 59] We try and show our children that we make lots of mistakes and that we require God's forgiveness as much as they will. And that we're not hypocritical and we're not setting them an unreachable standard because none of us reach the standard.

We're just setting them towards to look to Jesus. That's what we're doing. We're telling them about Jesus. And we know that as 1 Corinthians 7 reminds us, they're set apart. They're wholly set apart because they're the children of believers in this covenantal privilege that they have that's symbolised through baptism.

And so there's a great responsibility on us as parents, all of us. Great responsibility on us all as a congregation to support one another, to support the parents, young parents, newly married parents, older parents, parents with teenagers, parents when their kids leave home, all the different stages to support and encourage one another.

And for everyone in the congregation to be part of the family, but also everyone in the congregation to belong to the family, old and young, married and single, whether they're children themselves or whether they don't, that we all recognise a wider, broader family than just the nuclear or the kind of physical family that we celebrate also today.

So there's also then a responsibility on us as children who've been baptised to recognise the great privilege that God has given us.

[31 : 30] Great privilege that we have to come to that place as children where we claim the salvation that is offered and is symbolised in the baptism that we received and that we are children of promise.

A unique kind of place that we are and that you need to think of the question, what are you doing with the Christ who's symbolised in your own baptism? So we're really looking forward to the baptism today and we're rejoicing it.

We rejoice that so many of John and Kim's family and friends are here today. It's brilliant to see you. Thank you for coming. And it's great to see other people and friends and visitors today. Some of you might not have known it was a baptism.

Some of you might have just wondered off the street. It's great to have you here today, whoever you are, and we hope that you'll enjoy the baptism also. So we're at that stage where we're going to...

I'm going to pray briefly and then we're going to sing. And during that singing, if John and Kim will come forward with Sophie and the kids will all come back in.

[32 : 35] And if you come down the front and then I'll just go ahead with the baptism. And we look forward to that together. So let's bow our heads briefly in prayer. Lord God, we ask and pray for your blessing on what we have looked at today.

The centrality of what you want us to remember as a church. The visual signs and sales that you have given us. It might not have been what we would have chosen ourselves.

Because we often have a very different idea of what the church is about and what our faith is about. We thank you that it's not about our goodness. How could we ever match the perfection of God that our sin separates us from?

How could we ever do that? What an unbearable burden that would be. What a miserable, wretched life we would have trying to reach perfection. Knowing that we can never even begin to get there.

But how wonderful to know that Jesus has lived perfection for us. And yet died as a sinner in our place to take, to carry the cost. To be a substitute for us because he loves us.

[33 : 48] We thank you for that. There is no greater act of love and we thank you that the Lord's support and baptism also points to that. Speaks about that and reminds us of that.

So may your blessing be on us for the remainder of this worship. And may Jesus have the praise and the honor and the glory. Amen.