

The Last Supper

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[0 : 00] We're going to read from the New Testament together from the Gospel of Mark chapter 14 verses 12 to 25.

This is God's word. 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, when 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.

[1 : 13] And they began to be sorrowful and to say to him, one after another, is it I? And 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 the 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.

This is God's holy word. We're in the Gospel of Mark, and we're in the very last two days of Jesus' life. So this is Thursday.

[2 : 14] He's going to die on Friday morning. He's going to be crucified on Friday morning. And the last days of Jesus' life mean so much.

These are the 48 hours that changed the world. And really, these 48 hours that we're looking at for the next few weeks are the reason that we're here, the reason that we gather today.

And so there's a lot to say about the last couple days of Jesus' life. In this passage, Jesus predicts that he's going to be betrayed by one of the twelve that followed him most closely, and then he shares with them the very last supper before he dies.

And that is the basis of the institution of the Lord's Supper. We're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper in just a little bit. And so here we come to find the meaning of the Lord's Supper in this moment, this very last meal he eats.

And let's ask, what do we learn from it? What do we learn about the Lord's Supper here? And here's what we learn. We learn what the Lord's Supper means. The Lord's Supper means a lot, but the main thing in this passage that it's pointing us to is that the Lord's Supper is all about the lamb, the roasted lamb on the table.

[3 : 25] And secondly, who is the Lord's Supper for? And we learn in this meal that the Lord's Supper, I can say that supper, it's for the people in the room that night. It's for the people in the room.

Okay, so let's look at those two things. I think those are the big two things the passage draws out for us. First, what is the Lord's Supper about? It's about the lamb, ultimately.

Okay, this is a meal. The Lord's Supper, the last supper, it's a meal. And we're going to celebrate a meal in just a little bit. And this meal exists to remember the Passover.

So in Mark 14, Jesus celebrates the Passover meal with the disciples. And you can see in verse 12, it's the first day of unleavened bread. Okay, that's Thursday night.

So for 1st century Jew, the day starts at sunset. So days go sunset to sunset. So day one of a week-long celebration of the Exodus story begins on Thursday at sunset.

[4 : 23] And the very first way you kick off this whole week of unleavened bread is a feast, a seven-day feast, is you have a Passover meal, which is specifically focused on the night that Israel ran away from Egypt.

So it's the night that God said, if you want to flee Egypt, you've got to kill a lamb and put the blood over your doorpost. And keep your belt on, keep your socks and shoes on, your sandals in their day, because you're going to, as soon as you eat this meal, you are going for it.

You're getting out of here. And that's the beginning of the Exodus story. And so the Passover meal, Thursday night, marks that. They would celebrate that meal from sunset all the way till midnight. And so all afternoon on the day before the beginning of the feast, which is Thursday afternoon, in Jerusalem, they would sacrifice thousands of lambs, little lambs.

And that's all because they were preparing for the Passover meal that night. So lots of people had to eat it. And so they were getting ready, lots of lambs being sacrificed that day. Josephus, he's a first-century historian.

He tells us that in 66 AD, he said that there were two million people in Jerusalem for the Passover meal. Now, that's probably way more than it actually was.

[5 : 39] He's writing much later than this. Most scholars think that there was probably 250,000 people in Jerusalem, which is not a huge city, space-wise, for this Passover meal.

Now, if you've ever been here, like I have, and many of you have, right outside our door on the royal mile in the heart of August, during the festival, that's what we're thinking.

It's so packed, there are way too many people in the city that has room for it. And that means that if you've come to Jerusalem and to eat the Passover meal, you must come to Jerusalem.

You can't eat it outside the city gate. That's the law from the Old Testament. There's just no space. And so if you're going to eat the Passover meal in Jerusalem on the Passover night, you've got to prepare, you know, you've got to make a booking.

You've got to get ahead of this thing and be in advance. If you've ever wanted to go eat at one of the great restaurants in Edinburgh, you know how this works.

[6 : 43] We've got a gift card that somebody gave us at Christmas time to Six by Niko, one of the great restaurants in the city. And it's one of those things where if we say tomorrow, you know, it's a great day to go eat a great meal, let's go to Six by Niko.

We're going to call, and what are they going to say? They're at least four weeks away from being able to come eat a meal here. Well, that's the situation. There are 250,000 extra people in a city that cannot hold that many people.

You can't just have the Passover meal. They prepared for months for this. That's why it's so significant that Jesus on the day, on Thursday, sends two disciples and says he's outside the city in Bethany two miles away.

He says, now go into the city, you're going to see a man. He's going to have a jar of water. Lots of people carry water, you know? He says, you just follow him and he will take you to a place that is completely ready for us.

Now, the only way you get a booking for the Passover meal on the day is if you're God. You know, if you are in complete control, and that's the point that from verses 13 to 16, he's already got this set up even though he had done nothing.

[7 : 55] And that's because he is God and he can do that. And they go into the city and the message that he is in complete control. And the reason to say that now is because it's trying to say, Mark is telling us, Jesus is in complete control of everything that's about to happen from here out.

There are no surprises coming to him. Everything they're going to do to him, he's in charge of. It's not an accident, he's not passive. He's got it. And notice, if you look at the passages real quick, he says, when you get into the city, we're going to see a master and you can say, the teacher says, where is my guest room?

Jesus is saying, it's my room. And then he says, we're going to eat my meal with my disciples. He's owning this. He's the host. He's the ultimate host in total control of everything that's about to happen to him.

And that is why this Passover meal is all the more significant because Jesus knows what he's doing. He knows what he's giving. And this is what he's giving, this meal.

Now from verse 22, if you just jump down to 22 to 25, this is the Passover meal, the Last Supper, the basis of the Lord's Supper.

[9 : 08] And it's the Passover meal. And at the Passover meal, it was very, very normal for the host, whoever the host was, to stop the meal at certain points in a rhythm and to take the different elements on the table and to talk about them.

So what Jesus does here when he stops the meal and he says, look at the bread, that's normal. Everybody would have done that. They would have said, they would have picked up the elements. What were the elements?

The elements of the meal were always at least two things, unleavened bread and lamb roasted in bitter herbs. And we learn later in the tradition that wine became a staple of the meal as Israelite history went on.

Okay, so these are the elements. The host would stop and say, here's the bread and this is what it means. Here's the lamb. This is what it means. Here's the wine. This is what it means. Okay, so this is normal. What would they say about it?

The host normally would take the bread and he would hold it up and he said, here's the unleavened bread that in Exodus 12, God commanded us to eat on the night we run away from Egypt.

[10 : 12] Why is it unleavened? Because you don't have time to put yeast in it. You got to wait for it to rise if you do that and you are about to be, you're slaves that are about to be liberated.

Tonight, you don't have any time for yeast. And so you eat unleavened bread. So it's a sign that you are being liberated, but it's also a sign at the same time that you have not yet come to what you will come to.

So the other sense of unleavened bread in the Old Testament is that leaven stands for the fullness of time. It makes bread rise up. And one day you will eat leavened bread, bread with yeast, only in the promised land when you come to full salvation.

Right? Now is the time for unleavened bread because you're not yet where you will be. And then later in the Bible, just later in the Exodus story, the manna, this unleavened bread came down from heaven and they ate unleavened bread in the middle of the wilderness while they were being sustained by God.

It's the bread of heaven. And later the unleavened bread became in the prophets to stand for the awaiting of the leaven that is to come, the Messiah Himself. And so unleavened bread means the Messiah has not yet come.

[11 : 24] It reminds us that we wait the yeast, the fullness, the rising of the fullness of time that is to come. And so the host would pick up the unleavened bread and he would say, remember who you are.

You are people still in exile. You are people that have not yet come to full liberation. You are people that have not yet experienced the hope of the Messiah. You're still unleavened waiting for the leaven that is to come.

All right? Then the most important thing they would take, they would also take the wine and they would say, what's the wine? The wine reminds us of the blood that was put over the door, the blood of the lamb.

But then the most important character of all at the meal is the lamb. You may have heard the phrase before, the paschal lamb. And paschal in Greek means Passover.

So the paschal lamb is the Passover lamb. The word paschal is used right in this passage a couple of times. And there would come a moment, the climax of the meal, where the host would lift up the roasted lamb and say, this is the lamb that was slain.

[12 : 29] This is the lamb by whose blood we were freed from Egypt. So what happened that night in the Passover? The Passover in Exodus 12 and 13, what happened? God sent judgment down upon Egypt.

And the angel of death came to deliver Egypt to judgment. Her sons, but also the text tells us in Exodus 12, her gods were to be judged too. But when you read the Exodus story carefully, what you realize is that the death that came down to Egypt that night was not just for Egypt, but it was for Israel too.

In other words, there was an equality. It was saying that all of you deserve judgment. Israelites and Egyptians alike, and you might remember in Deuteronomy and other places, God said to Israel, when I take you out of bondage and save you, do not think that I showed you mercy because you're better.

Don't think that I released you from bondage because you're great, you're moral, and the Egyptians were the bad guys. No, he says you're all equal. Really sinful, equally deserving of judgment.

And the only way on the Passover night you're going to escape death is if you slay a lamb and pour the blood over the doorpost of your home to say that the blood of the lamb has substituted, has died in my place this night, so that I might be a slave that will be liberated from bondage, a slave liberated from death forever.

[13 : 56] And so the host of the meal would stand up and say, here is the lamb. By whose blood we were saved.

We were once slaves in Egypt, now we've been liberated. We were sinners deserving of the judgment of death in Egypt, and God sent us to salvation by the blood of the lamb.

All sorts of ways they would say it, but that's what the host would do. Now that is why this moment is so surprising because the disciples who do not have eyes to see yet, as we've seen in the last couple of weeks, they're sitting there at this meal and they expect Jesus, the host, to do the exact same thing that every other host would do on the Passover night.

He'd stand up and say, this is the bread, this is the unleavened bread that we ate the night we ran from Egypt. He doesn't do it. He stands up and says, this unleavened bread, you see this, verse 22, he says, this is my body.

Take it and eat it. And what is he saying in that moment? Well, if you put all the pieces together, he's saying, this bread means that I, I, my body standing before you right now is the bread of heaven that sustains you in the wilderness.

[15 : 13] My, you know, I, I am the thing that's about to happen. But you know, he, he snaps it in half the bread. He breaks it. He says, my, this bread, my body is about to be broken.

And at that moment, unleavened bread is going to become leavened for you. You know, he, he was saying, I am the very thing that the unleavened bread has always been about. The hope that one day a Messiah would come, the bread of heaven that would feed every spiritual hunger and ache you've ever had.

And he said, this is me, this bread. And then he got up and he said, you see this wine? It's the blood of my covenant. And in the Old Testament, the wine has two, two main images.

I've already mentioned one, the negative side. It is that it's the blood that got poured over the doorpost. It's the blood that was sprinkled in the blood right in the temple for purification, saying that we don't deserve God's mercy.

There has to be blood in our place. There has to be sacrifice on our behalf or we will die before the Lord. And Jesus says, this is it. My blood is the blood of purification.

[16 : 18] My blood is the blood that can cleanse you. My blood is the blood that can sanctify you. My blood is the blood that was smeared over the doorpost. It was always about this moment.

Now this is, this is what that means. The bread, the lamb, the wine, the herbs, the Exodus story, the Passover, the sacrificial system.

Take a story in the Old Testament, pick a symbol in the Old Testament. It was always about Jesus. Before Jesus ever came, everything that happened in the Old Testament was all about getting to Him.

Every symbol instituted in the Old Testament was pointing to this moment. It's not that these symbols, bread, wine, lamb from the Old Testament give meaning to Jesus, but that God from all of eternity looked at Jesus in the middle of history, and He is what gives meaning to those symbols in the past.

You see? It's not that He gets His meaning from those symbols. It's that bread and wine and the lamb all get their meaning from Him in the middle of human history.

[17 : 31] It was always about this moment. That's what it ultimately means. Now we need to move on, but what's missing? Jesus stands up and says, this is the bread, it's my body.

This is the wine, it's my blood, but do you notice what's not there? The most important character in the Passover feast is what? The lamb.

And there is no moment where Jesus says, now in here is the roasted lamb. Remember the Passover night? He never says it. He never does it. He says, there's bread, there's wine, there's body, there's blood, but where's the lamb?

And, you see why? Because the lamb is the host, and the host is the lamb. The lamb is the speaker himself. That's why when John the Baptist sees Jesus in the Gospel of John, he lifts up his head and says what?

Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The lamb was in the room. You see, it's not that the lamb of the Passover in the Old Testament is the meaning that makes sense of Jesus, it's that Jesus was always the one who made sense of the lamb.

[18 : 37] It had always been that way. So that means that the Last Supper is about the cross. It's about Jesus' body being broken. It's about his blood being poured out.

It's that he is the bread of heaven. He satisfies every spiritual hunger. Are you spiritually hungry? He alone can give you the satisfaction you need for that ache.

And he is the wine, the other side of the wine. He's the wine of the feast. You see, the wine means blood, but the wine also means feasting, festival drink.

It's about celebration and sorrow simultaneously. The bread is snapped. You know, it's the bread of heaven. It gives you life, but the bread has to be snapped. His body has to be broken if it's going to become for you the bread that gives you life.

His blood has to be poured if it's going to become the wine for you that brings you to the festival, festival joy. And here at the very end of this institution of the Lord's Supper, you see what he says, he calls the wine the blood of my covenant.

[19 : 40] And then he says, truly I say to you, I will not drink it again until I drink it anew in the kingdom of God. So at the very end, he makes this oath. He swears.

He makes a vow. And he says, I will not touch the wine again until it's all accomplished. Now that vow and the phrase he uses, blood of the covenant is taking us back to the Old Testament to one different moment.

And that moment is in Genesis 15. So what does he call this blood, the blood of the covenant? In Genesis 15, God had made his covenant with Abraham and he said, Abraham, I'm going to save the world through you and your people.

In fact, there's going to be one son that comes from your lineage that will be the leaven, that will be the sea, that will be the hope of the world. And he said, but today we make a covenant.

I promise to you, I will do this. And Abraham, you promise to me that you will follow me. And when it came time, it was very common to make covenant ceremonies in the Old Testament.

[20 : 43] The way God said it is what we're going to do is we're going to cut all these animals into two pieces in half. And we're going to make an aisle like this aisle right here in front of me. And there would be animals cut in half along each side and the blood would be all across the ground.

That's how it worked. It was a big mess. And when it came time to make the ceremony, you say, I promise to you, God, I will follow you because you've promised to me you will save me.

And both parties have to pass between the aisle. And what are you saying? You're saying, Abraham would have said, when I pass through the aisle, I'm promising, Lord, I will follow you.

Or may I become like one of these animals snapped into blood on the ground. And when it came time, God put Abraham to sleep and God passed between the pieces twice.

And he was saying, if Abraham, if any human being, you know, I promise to save humanity, but if any of those humans fail, they don't follow me. They don't keep the terms of the covenant.

[21 : 44] God was saying, may I become snapped in half like these animals. May I experience the blood on the ground, my blood.

It's a scandalous promise. God was saying, if you fail, may I die. And in Jesus Christ on this night, he says, look, my body's going to be snapped, cut in half.

And I promise I vow like Genesis 15 that I will not drink the festival drink wine again until it's all done. It's the fulfillment of Genesis 15.

Who is this supper for, lastly, briefly? Now this is the meaning of the supper. Who is it for? And the answer is, it's for the people in that room that day.

It's for the people in the room today. We see that. Maybe you look at all this. There's been 17 minutes of talk about blood so far and sacrifice and lambs and smearing over doorposts and the temple and all sorts of things.

[22 : 45] And you say, I'm a modern person. And this is old religion. Sacrifice, blood, justice, offering, all this sort of stuff.

And even if you're a Christian today, you look and read about this in the Old Testament. You read about this and you say, it's a foreign aspect to me. This idea of sacrifice and the blood of the lamb being poured in my place.

And I just want to say, hold on for just a second. Some people we say, look, the Lord's Supper, it's about community building. It's about strengthening the people that will love one another more. That's true.

That's an element. But hold on a second. It's more, here's, look, we all have a sense, I think all of us, no matter what you might believe in today, that when a great injustice is committed, there has to be an act of justice.

When a great wrongdoing happens, punishment becomes necessary. We know that our society cannot function unless we know that, unless there's a moral order in place that when we act against it, we deserve punishment.

[23 : 48] We know that instinctively, we know that as human beings. And let me just ask you just to look for a second. Who is at this table at the Last Supper? Well, look at how the passage set up.

We skipped over 17 to 21. And in 17 to 21, we learned that it's the betrayer at the table, Judas. One of you is about to betray me. It's a person who I am dipping my hand into the roasted lamb and all these things.

We're sharing the meal together. You're going to betray me. Now, we'll come back to Judas next week in the Garden of Gethsemane. But if you look down just after the Lord's Supper, if you have a Bible in verse 27, after the Lord's Supper's Institute, Jesus turns to the rest of the people at the table and says, every one of you is going to fall away and betray me.

You see, the story, the way the Last Supper worked was, betrayal, I'm going to die for you and all of you are going to betray me. Betrayal, Jesus for me, betrayal.

It's sandwiched in betrayers all around it. And Mark is trying to communicate something, I think, to us in the way he set that up. You know, you say, is the justice of the blood of Christ God sent his only son to die in my place really necessary?

[25 : 08] And you know, I'm a good person. I'm a normal person. I'm not Judas. You know, I'm not in the prison. I'm not murdered anyone.

You know, I can see this level of sacrifice for Nero and for Caligula and for the great evil of history. But I mean, I'm a normal person.

Sure I've made mistakes. And you see what Mark's doing? He's saying, yeah, sure Judas, but don't you see that Jesus then turns to these fishermen, to these very normal lower middle income people and just says, every single one of you is going to betray me.

And so I'm going to die for you. And what he's trying to say to us is that when you come to the table today, you've got to be willing to say, Christ Jesus died for the sinners, not out there, but in the room.

He died that night for the men in the room, the women in the room. He died today for the men and women in the room. It's personal. It's for every one of us individually.

[26 : 13] That's what he's saying here. The God of all the earth made every single one of us. And he said, my friend, my son, my daughter, I love you. I want to be in forever relationship with you. And we betrayed.

We left. And he was surrounded by a bunch of betrayers. And he said, and so I'm coming down my body snapped and my blood poured for you.

Do you know that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ died for every single one of us individually and corporately that it's so personal that Jesus, the son from eternity, knows you by your name from forever and came to die for you that personally because your sin is so personal towards him?

Because we betrayed him so personally. That's how real it is, friends. Our blood is required of us, yet he gave his for us. One of my favorite, as we come to a close, one of my favorite moments in all of literature is in C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*.

This is a book about heaven. It's a hypothetical image. Don't study it to learn the theology of heaven. It's more of a thought experiment.

[27 : 33] And what happens in it is people from below, from earth, come up on a bus, a tour bus into heaven and they're given a tour of heaven. It's kind of modeled after Dante's books.

And this very early in the book, chapter four, this unnamed man, it gets off the tour bus in heaven. He's walking, he's coming through heaven and he's like a ghost to heaven.

He's like a spirit. He's unnamed, I'll just give him the name Tom because it makes it easier to talk about. This is a paraphrase. Tom is touring heaven and he meets a man who he knew from his life on earth named Lynn.

And Tom is very, very angry to see Lynn in heaven because Lynn had committed a murder in his earthly life. He had murdered a man named Jack.

And they all worked together, Tom and Lynn and Jack. And this is what angry Tom says to Lynn when he sees him in heaven. He says, it isn't right that you were here, Lynn.

[28 : 34] What about old Jack? You murdered him and Lynn said, I did, but it's okay now. I'm forgiven. Jack is here too, actually.

And Tom said, what I don't understand is why you're here and I'm not here. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Personally, I think you and I should be the other way around.

I should be up here. You should be down there. You know, I wasn't a religious man and I don't, but I would never say, and I don't say I had no faults, but I've done my best in all of life.

That's what he says. That's what Lewis writes. I did my best by everyone. I never asked for anything that wasn't mine by rights. You know, I took my wages only if I'd done the job. You see, that's the sort I was.

I'm only asking for my rights. I got to have my rights, you see. And Lynn said, oh no, I didn't get my rights. He said, I haven't gotten what I deserved.

[29 : 29] If you would give yourself away, you would get something far better than your rights, far better than what you deserve. And Tom said, I always did my best.

Why should I not be here when a murderer like you is? I'm not asking for anybody's charity. I don't come for charity. And Lynn said, well then do ask for it.

Ask for God's charity. Everything's awaiting you. Everything is here for the asking. If you would just ask and receive, take and eat, we might say.

Why should I ask for charity, Tom said? I'm a decent man. I did my best. And then Lynn says, you are not a decent man. You did not do your best. And if you just think about it, friends, if you just think about it for a moment today, no matter what you believe, this is what Lynn says, it's true of all of us.

He says, if you think about it for a moment and you really look at your heart, you will know you did not do your best. And Lynn says to Tom, you know, I murdered you every day in my heart because you were cruel.

[30 : 30] You were a cruel boss. You were hard on your wife. You were hard on your family. You were hard on everybody. You did not do your best. And Tom says, that's private. That's my private business.

Lynn says, there is no such thing as a private affair before the Lord. And he said, but forget about that now. Ask for the charity of God, and I will show you the joy in the mountains.

And Tom said, I will not go. I will not be a man who snivels along for charity. Now listen, in Acts 2, as we close, Peter says, you crucified Jesus Christ.

He says it to people who were not present physically for the crucifixion. All of us, our sin, put him there. It's that personal. And he's saying that sometimes we minimize that as modern people by saying, yeah, I've made mistakes.

Of course, everybody makes mistakes. But when you really look down, when you really consider, when you really look at your heart this morning, are you willing to say it's personal? I put him there. What do you do?

[31 : 31] What do you do right now? You listen to Jesus. He said, take, receive. Ask for charity. Take and receive and eat this morning.

This is the meal for people who know they need redemption. This is the meal for people who can say today, I was once a slave, and now I've been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

Let's pray together. Lord, we ask that as we come to the table that we would know the condition for our coming, that we would never stand on our rights, that we would never say we're good people.

The condition we come on today is that Jesus pulled up a chair for us at the table. The condition we come on today is that Jesus said that is his body broken, that he, his body, his blood really is the feast.

And so because this has already happened in the past, we come today to drink the festival wine. And we pray that you would make it powerful unto us in Christ's name. Amen.