**The New Covenant in Jesus’ Blood**

Luke 22:1-23, Key Verse 22:20

*“In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’”*

In today’s passage, Jesus eats what is traditionally called the Last Supper with his disciples. It’s actually the Jewish Passover celebration, but Jesus takes that and reveals what God intended it to mean all along, using the elements of the meal as symbols to indicate the meaning of his death. He establishes a new covenant with his disciples and us.

It’s called the “new” covenant because it superseded the covenants that came before, which were given in the Old Testament. But I think there is another reason to call it the new covenant—it’s because, even though it is now 2000 years old, it it’s always fresh and life-giving. It really means a new way of relating to God. Are you looking for something new in your life? Even if we have been a Christian for a long time, the new covenant should feel new to us. Let’s pray that we may realize, for the first time or the hundredth time, the newness of the covenant that Jesus made with us.

1. God prepares Jesus’ sacrifice (1-13)

In Verse 1, Luke, the author tells us when the events of Jesus’ suffering and death took place within the Jewish calendar year, and it has a great significance. It says, “Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching…” The Passover was the most important of all Israel’s yearly festivals or holidays. For one thing, it commemorated the birth of their nation, like our Independence Day on the fourth of July. For Israel, the Passover was also their independence day, because that’s when they escaped from Egypt where they were all enslaved by Pharaoh. This happened under the leadership of Moses and is described in the book of Exodus. You might also know that the only way Pharaoh could be convinced to let Israel go was by God sending ten plagues on Egypt. The Passover is named after what happened in the tenth and final plague.

When Pharaoh hardened his heart even after nine devastating plagues came on his nation, finally God sent the plague of the firstborn, in which the angel of death would fly over all the households in Egypt and kill the firstborn of every family. Interestingly, the people of Israel were not automatically exempted from this punishment. Rather, each family had to sacrifice a year-old lamb and spread its blood on the doorpost of their houses. They also had to roast the meat of the lamb and eat it. When the angel of death saw this blood of the lamb on someone’s house, he would pass over them and the firstborn in that house would not die. That’s why it’s called the Passover. After Pharaoh was hit by this final plague, he drove Israel out of Egypt in the middle of the night. Thus, the Passover celebrated the event that liberated Israel from slavery in Egypt. As we see later in the passage, the Passover was a foreshadowing of what Jesus himself would do, not just for Israel but for the whole world.

We have seen how Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and teaching there angered the Jewish religious leaders and made them further determined to try to stop him. Verse 2 tells us that these chief priests and teachers of the law were actively looking for a way to get rid of Jesus. But thus far, they had not found any way to do so, because they were afraid of the reaction from all the people who were blessed by Jesus’ teaching and healing.

Tragically, the opportunity that the religious leaders were looking for was brought to them by one of Jesus’ own disciples. Verse 3 says that at this time “Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve.” Satan’s influence on Judas led him to go to the chief priests and officers of the temple guard and discuss a plan for Judas to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present. The religious leaders were delighted and offered to give Judas money.

Here we see that the events leading to Jesus’ death were set in motion by a betrayal. Jesus was not overpowered by his enemies but taken deceitfully by someone who had been his friend. What Judas did is worse than what the religious leaders did, because it is a betrayal.

In response to this, one question we might have is, how did Judas fall so strongly under the influence of the evil one, Satan? And what can we do to prevent ourselves from being used by Satan in such a way? I think some evidence of how Satan came into Judas is shown to us here by the author, when he points out that this was done for money. The other gospels also say things to the effect that Judas had a very strong love of money that was sinful. I don’t think Satan can normally come into someone like suddenly making them go into a trance or something for no reason. The way Satan works is that he uses our own sinful desires to manipulate and control us, tempting us, making false promises about what money or something else can do for us. If we follow those promptings too far, finally, Satan can make us do things we previously thought we would never do, like how Judas exchanged friendship with Jesus for some coins. Judas’ love of money was the hook that Satan could grab him with.

Everybody has sinful desires. But the important thing is not to let them take root in our hearts. When sinful desires when they spring up in our hearts, we must not cherish and nurture them because of the sweet promises they make, but treat those desires as our worst enemy, giving them no place in our thought life. I think this is what Jesus meant when he said, “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off.” That was what Judas did not do. When he did not repent of his sinful love of money, he became the devil’s instrument in the most evil plan.

However, in spite of this conspiracy of evil that was going on, this passage also shows us that God was the one ultimately in control, using even the deeds of evil people to fulfill his plan. Verse 7 says, “Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.” There is a double meaning in this verse. On one hand, Luke is telling us again that it was a specific day of the Jewish festival and that it was celebrated by sacrificing lambs. But he is also telling us that it is time for Jesus to become God’s true Passover lamb. Jesus himself knew this, and the way he cooperates with God’s plan, while helping his disciples understand, is amazing.

First of all, Jesus would celebrate the Passover with his disciples in Jerusalem, observing the Jewish tradition. So verse 8 says that Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” There was just one problem. Jesus and his disciples were all Galileans, and none of them had any place or property in Jerusalem where they could meet. If you’ve ever tried to rent a banquet hall for an event, like a wedding, you know that it is very expensive. It can be something like $200 a plate. The disciples did not have that kind of money. So Peter and John asked, “Where do you want us to prepare for it?”

It was here that Jesus again revealed his divine foreknowledge of God’s plan, much like he had when he had the disciples get the donkey for his entry into Jerusalem a few days before. Look at verses 10-12. Jesus replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, 11and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 12He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.” Jesus knew someone who had a room available for them to use for free, and he gave the two disciples a sign for them recognize who it was—he would a man carrying a jar of water. This was unusual because in that culture, men did not usually carry water—it was the women who typically did that job.

Peter and John went by faith and found things just as Jesus had told them. It was another unforgettable experience of Jesus’ sovereignty for them. In our Bible study Friday night, Missionary Paul pointed out that also, when the room was prepared in this way by just Peter and John, Judas Iscariot would not know in advance where the place was—Jesus didn’t give an address! And so, Jesus would not be captured while they were still eating the Passover. In everything, Jesus was fully aware of and cooperating with God’s sovereign salvation plan, and helping his disciples participate in it.

Don’t you want to learn to co-work with Jesus according to God’s plan like this? I do. Well, it just requires faith and obedience like these disciples had. If we can strike out on faith sometimes, we can be a part of God’s plan, not just our plan, and God can do something new and unexpected in our lives.

1. The New Covenant in Jesus’ Blood (14-23)

When Jesus sat down to eat this Passover meal, he knew that it would be his last before his death. The disciples were still in denial about this, though he had tried to tell them multiple times. It seems like a very awkward and sorrowful situation. But look at what Jesus said in verse 15. “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” Jesus was not depressed but full of desire to have this Passover, because he knew how meaningful it was. In fact, Jesus was about to reveal to them the full meaning of the Passover as it was originally intended by God, but kept hidden until that time.

Jesu said in verse 16, “I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” The elements of the Passover meal were symbols of a spiritual reality that will find fulfillment in the Kingdom of God. By keeping this ceremony on earth, the disciples and us turn our thoughts away from earth and toward God’s kingdom, our true hope. This statement is also to give the disciples resurrection hope. Indeed, Jesus was about to suffer greatly, as he said, but after his death he would rise and meet them again in the kingdom of God.

Jesus gave meaning to two elements of the Passover: the cup of wine, and the bread. He took the cup and told the disciples to each drink from it. What did he say the cup represented? Let’s read verse 20, our key verse. “In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” By having the disciples drink, they are joining him in establishing a new covenant, right then and there.

What is a covenant? A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties, an agreement with specific terms. Throughout the Bible, a covenant is the basis of the relationship between God and his people. Actually, God has no obligation to make covenants; he doesn’t have to bind himself at all—he can do whatever he pleases. But in love he commits himself to his people for their good. He is the God of promise who keeps his promises. In the book of Genesis, God made a covenant with Abraham, promising to give his descendants the land of Canaan, and he established it through a ceremony with symbols just like Jesus does here.

In the book of Exodus, after God brought Israel out of Egypt on Passover, Moses led them to Mount Sinai and God established a covenant with all Israel there. At Sinai God said, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’” You see that this covenant has two sides: God keeps his part, and of the people of Israel had to keep their part as well.

What were the terms that Israel had to keep in that covenant given at Sinai? In the ceremony to seal that covenant, done with sprinkled blood as described in Exodus 24, Moses said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” Here, “these words” refers to the words on the tablets that God gave to Moses—the Ten Commandments. That covenant was called the covenant of Law, because it was based on Israel keeping the righteous laws that God gave to them at Sinai.

However, this covenant of Law could not save Israel, because they broke it. In fact, they broke it immediately, as soon as it was given. While Moses was still on Mount Sinai talking to God, the people made a golden calf and began to engage in sinful idol worship, already forgetting the holy God who brought them out of Egypt. When Moses saw this, he was so angry he took the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments on them and threw them down the mountain, smashing them to pieces. What could be a clearer sign of them breaking God’s covenant? At that time Moses prayed for the people’s forgiveness, so God would not destroy them, and God agreed to still go with Israel and he gave Moses a new set of tablets. But nonetheless, it was shown at the very beginning that this covenant could not be the true one to establish an eternal relationship between God and people. It didn’t work for Israel, and we also cannot be saved through the Law. If our salvation depends on us keeping God’s holy laws, then we cannot be saved, because our sinful nature leads us to break God’s law over and over again.

The prophets of the Old Testament understood this, seeing Israel’s many failures throughout the centuries. So they prophesied that a time was coming when God would establish a new covenant. The prophet Jeremiah wrote in the book of Jeremiah: *“‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord.”* Jeremiah was talking about the covenant that God would make through Jesus, the promised Messiah. Thus, when Jesus gave the cup to his disciples on the night of the Last Supper, he was describing how he was establishing the covenant that was the fulfillment of the whole Bible, of God’s eternal plan, the gospel itself.

How would Jesus establish this new covenant? He would do it through his death, which is why he said “This is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” The wine in the cup was a symbol of Jesus’ own blood which he would shed. Why is the covenant in blood? That may seem gory or morbid. But it means that Jesus’ death would be a sacrifice that is effective for the forgiveness of all our sins in the sight of God.

The Bible clearly teaches that sin is real to a Holy God. He cannot just ignore it or tolerate it. Sin has consequences; it has a price. We may do something sinful, and if nobody finds out, we may feel that we got away with it. But that’s not the case. The price of that sin is still very real. The Bible says that the price of sin is one’s very life, or as it says in Romans, “The wages of sin is death.” That is why the in the Old Testament God prescribed sacrifices for sin, to show their price. The Bible says “the life of a creature is in the blood”, and so by shedding the animals’ blood, the people could begin to understand the price of forgiveness.

But in fact, the blood of animals could never atone for human sin. Only one type of blood is powerful enough to wash away our sins—the blood of Jesus. It’s because he is the sinless man, and son of God, and so his willing sacrifice on the cross has power to fully wash away the sins of everyone who trusts him. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. The new covenant in Jesus’ blood is for the forgiveness of our sins, which brings real salvation.

By drinking from the cup, the disciples would symbolize their acceptance by faith of Jesus’ sacrifice. We cannot keep God’s law. We are powerless in ourselves to do anything to earn God’s salvation; but the new covenant is different. In the new covenant, we simply receive salvation in Jesus as a gift by faith. This is the gospel. In Romans 3:25 Paul wrote, “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.” If we receive Jesus’ blood by faith, the angel of death, representing the penalty of sin, will pass over us and we will not be condemned. Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

There was one other element to the Passover ceremony that Jesus gave; it was the bread. Look at verse 19. “And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” The bread represents Jesus’ body that died on the cross. As the Passover lamb’s flesh was eaten to give Israel strength for their Exodus journey, Jesus gave himself for us not only to forgive our sins but to become the source of new life for us. He is our true spiritual nourishment in the journey of life.

After the meal, Jesus gave a somber alert to his disciples, saying that the hand that would betray his was on the table with his. Jesus already knew what Judas Iscariot had done. Jesus knew that God was in control, and he said “The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed.” Everything that happened would be the fulfillment of God’s salvation plan in the scriptures. But that didn’t relieve Judas of the responsibility for what he was about to do. Jesus gave him one last chance to repent, saying “But woe to that man who betrays him!”

Jesus’ statement about his betrayal seemed to throw his disciples into confusion, and they began to question and, I’m sure, gossip among themselves about which one of them it was. Their response seems most inappropriate for this holy occasion. They should have reflected on themselves and repented, but their spiritual level was still too low. But thank God Jesus didn’t reject them but still made his covenant with them. Later they would understand.

Today we saw how Jesus used the Last Supper to teach his disciples his new covenant. When Jesus gave the cup and the bread to his disciples, he said “Do this in remembrance of me.” We refresh Jesus’ covenant in our hearts whenever we remember and meditate on the gospel. As fallible human beings, we easily forget what was done by Jesus and how it gave us forgiveness and new life. It’s easy to go back to the old way of living based on our self-righteousness or self-judgment. Thankfully, even if we forget, it doesn’t cancel this new covenant, because it is all God’s grace. We just need to remember that the new covenant in Jesus’ blood gives us a different way. Jesus’ new covenant liberates us from the old punishment-based way of relating to God, so we can bear fruit for his glory in a relationship of love and trust.

If you have never entered into a covenant relationship with Jesus, if you are still trying to “get right with God” in your own way, please give it up and simply accept Jesus’ blood today. That is the way to cross over from death to life. Thank God for the new covenant in Jesus’ blood. Let’s read the key verse one more time.