

CHRIST, THE PASSOVER LAMB

Mark 14:12-26

INTRODUCTION

“Jesus was spending his last evening on earth in quiet seclusion with his apostles. It was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and they had met to eat the Passover meal together in a friend's house. The place is described as ‘a large upper room, furnished and ready’, and we can picture them round a low meal-table, reclining on cushions on the floor. Evidently no servant was in attendance, so that there had been no one to wash their feet before the meal began. Nor was any of the apostles humble enough to undertake this menial task. It was to their intense embarrassment, therefore, that during supper Jesus put on a slave's apron, poured water into a basin, and went round washing their feet, thus doing what none of them had been willing to do. He then proceeded to tell them how authentic love always expresses itself in humble service and how the world would identify them as his disciples only if they loved one another. In contrast to the priority of sacrificial and serving love, he warned them that one of them was going to betray him. He also spoke much of his impending departure, of the coming of the Comforter to take his place, and of this Spirit of truth's varied ministry of teaching and witnessing.

Then, at some point while the meal was still in progress, they watched enthralled as he took a loaf of bread, blessed it (that is, gave thanks for it), broke it into pieces and handed it round to them with the words, ‘This is my body, which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper had ended, he took a cup of wine, gave thanks for it, passed it round to them, and said either ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood’ or ‘This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me’.

These are tremendously significant deeds and words. It is a pity that we are so familiar with them that they tend to lose their impact.”

John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 67

The words that Jesus said and the things He did that evening in that upper room shed a great deal of light on Jesus' own view of His death. As He dramatized His approaching sacrifice, He also explained the

significance and meaning of what was about to take place. And He teaches us several things about His death and the cross. I want to focus on three lessons this morning.

First lesson...

The Centrality of His Death

The priority of the cross. During His last evening together with them He gave them and us instructions for His memorial service. Compare - not a one-time memorial but an oft-repeated service.

Procedure - words and actions - take, bless, break and distribute the bread and then the wine.

Symbols - what do they represent - His body, not alive, but given for them. His blood, not warm flowing through His veins but shed for them and us. And so the whole ceremony speaks of His death. With both of the elements we are reminded of His sacrifice.

It is also significant that the one ceremonial observance that Jesus left for His followers and for His church should center on his death. Not His birth or His life, or the things He did or the things He said, but His death, the sacrifice of Himself offered for us at Calvary.

In the communion service we are shown and taught the centrality of His death. Without the cross there could be no Christianity.

Second lesson...

The Purpose of His Death.

In Jesus words that evening with His disciples we find a clue to the meaning and purpose of the cross. As Jesus blessed the cup He said, "This is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Matt. 26:28. What did He mean?

Centuries ago - covenant with Abraham - land, posterity, etc. Gen. 15 – we have the confirming of that covenant with the shedding of blood. Several hundred years later God renewed that covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, where He pledged that He would be their God and they would be His people. And there the covenant was once again confirmed with blood.

Exodus 24:6-8 – And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Over the next several hundred years, the children of Israel continually disobeyed the words of the covenant, leading to God's judgment and ultimately to being removed from their land. But one day, about six centuries before Christ came, God spoke to His people through the prophet Jeremiah and He said,

Jeremiah 31:31-34 - "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Again, hundreds of years went by, until one night in an upper room, a simple carpenter from Nazareth told His followers, This covenant is about to be ushered in. This forgiveness that Jeremiah spoke about will be available to you because of my blood. It is my blood that will confirm or ratify this new covenant.

So, Christ tells us that the purpose of His death is to put into place this new covenant, the key feature of which is the forgiveness of sin. And every time we come to the Lord's Table, we are reminded that this cup is a symbol of the blood that ushered in and confirmed the new covenant, the blood that offers us forgiveness of sins.

Third Lesson...

The Need to Personally Appropriate His Death

As Jesus sat in that upper room and visually, graphically portrayed His impending death and its meaning for them, it is very clear that they were more than spectators. They were participants in what was taking place. Jesus said, "This is my body. Take, eat.... This is my blood, drink of it, all of you..."

It was not enough that the bread be broken, and the wine be poured out. It was necessary that they partake of it. So it is with Christ's sacrifice. It is not enough that Christ's body be given in sacrifice, and His blood shed. We must be partakers of that broken body and shed blood.

It is this same truth to which Jesus was pointing us in John 6 when He said "I am the bread of life..." see verses 51-54.

John 6:51-54 – "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

He was not speaking of taking communion for that had not yet been given, but these are two separate incidents pointing to the same truth, the same reality.

It is a mistake to believe that just because Christ died for the world that makes everything all right in the world and solves everyone's sin problem. God does not impose His gifts on us. Christ died for you, but He requires that you be a partaker in His sacrifice, by appropriating His blood and having it applied to your life.

CONCLUSION

So there are three lessons that Christ teaches us in the institution of this communion service:

- ◇ The centrality of His death – without it there would be no hope, no salvation, no Christianity
- ◇ The purpose of His death – to usher in the new covenant, with the reality of forgiveness and cleansing
- ◇ The need to personally appropriate his death in our lives

As we come near the Lord's table this morning, my question to you is, have you applied the blood to your heart? Are you truly a partaker in His broken body and shed blood?