

Sermon Title: The Lord's Supper
Scripture Text: Mark 14:22-26

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 12-8-19

I realize what reckless abandon it takes to actually suggest a significant change to the order of the service from what we usually do when we come to the Lord's Table, but hang in there—we may not have a church split, and I'll probably suggest we go *back* to what you're used to next time. But I have, for many years, had a pretty strong preference that, when we celebrate Communion, we do it in the *middle* of the service, so that it's part of our *focus*; not so that we do everything else, and then the preacher says, "Oh, yeah...this is 'Communion Sunday'—we'd better tack that on, too," and you start it, and it's already past the normal time of the end of the service, and people are sitting there thinking, "Kickoff is in an hour and we've got to have lunch, and..." We don't want that to be the case.

I had friends who visited a church; they didn't know anything about it, they were out of town for the weekend; they went to this church, and it was kind of the Modern Church of What's Happening Now. It was "Communion Sunday," and toward the end of the service, the pastor said, "This is 'Communion Sunday,' so, by the door back there, there's some bread and some juice, and help yourself on the way out, if you want to." I'm not kidding! That *actually* happened. I think it ought to be a little bit more *serious* than that (see 1 Cor. 11:27).

And as we come to our text today, you'll see the introduction to this remembrance that we will come and celebrate soon. As we arrive in Mark Chapter 14, Verses 22 through 26, it is—in the chronology of the life of Jesus—shortly after sundown on Thursday evening of the week that He's going to die on Friday; He'll be on the Cross by 9:00 the next morning. As we arrive at our text, He is in a private upper room, somewhere in Jerusalem, with His Twelve Disciples, and they are going to celebrate the Passover together, as they had the other Passovers during Jesus's ministry.

Now, I want to take a little bit of time—as a matter of fact, the *majority* of our time—introducing our text. You already know the words of our text, but by the time we get there, they'll be *very* familiar to you. You've heard them *many* times, if you've been a believer for very long. But I want to talk about what it was they were doing when it says they came to celebrate the Passover. So what? What was the Passover meal?

The Passover meal—or, it's often called "Seder"—was a leisurely evening, full of tradition and Scripture; it was inaugurated in Exodus Chapter 12, before Israel left Egypt. There was the Passover celebration, followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because they were not to take any leavened bread—they were not to allow time for the bread to rise, because they were to leave in haste. So, ever since that time, the Passover not only remembered the Angel of Death "passing over" all the homes where the blood of the lamb was applied; but also, it was immediately followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, where the lack of leaven is the symbol of the lack of carrying anything over from your life of slavery into your new redeemed status (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6-8).

So it's a very significant amount of symbolism, and they devoted the whole evening to it. We have a pretty good idea of what it was like in the time of Jesus. We can't be dogmatic about all the details, but this tradition *has* been passed down quite carefully through the Jewish culture, through the centuries.

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A couple of years before I was a Christian, I got invited to be a guest at the Passover meal of a family that lived near us. They were actually a *liberal* Jewish family, and even in that liberal Jewish family, they were quite rigorous about what they did at the Passover. So we do have a pretty good idea what it was like. And I can just imagine: if you're celebrating the Passover with the Son of God leading it, that must have been profound. From the text of the Gospels, we can see that Jesus probably spent several hours that night around the table with His men. Typical Passover celebrations take two, maybe even three hours, and we know that Jesus added *extensive teaching* to that—everything that we have recorded in John 13 through 16.

They gathered for the feast home by home; often there would be guests involved, but this was family by family. The feast would begin with a prayer of thanksgiving: thanksgiving for God's deliverance and for His protection, for His goodness. And then, there was a ceremony, four times during the Passover meal, in which of a cup of wine was shared; it was diluted red wine. The first cup came right away after this prayer, and a chalice of this diluted wine would be passed around the table, with each person taking a sip. You can see right away that the Passover was a *communal* meal; this is not something you do privately, it's not something you do individually—everybody is involved, even to the point of sharing the cup, and that's one of the characteristics that is passed along to the Lord's Supper.

The next step, after the first cup, was a ceremony of washing hands. Your hands symbolize the things you do; your feet symbolize where go; so your handwashing was a way of symbolizing your need for holiness and cleansing from sin. Nobody would typically come to the meal with *dirty* hands, but that was a symbolic thing. Some surmise that right after that first cup might have been where the Twelve Apostles were still arguing over which of them was to be "the greatest" (Lk. 22:24)—and remember, there was no household servant available to them that night to handle the basin for the washing, so that might have been the place that Jesus not only helped with the *handwashing*, but where He took charge of the basin and washed the *feet* of the disciples. We don't know that for sure—like I say, you can't be absolutely dogmatic about the order of things, but John 13:3 through 20 might have fit at that point.

The handwashing ceremony was followed by eating bitter herbs. Why? Well, the bitter herbs symbolized the harshness and the afflictions of the Hebrew people that they endured while they were slaves in Egypt; so they were remembering the bitterness of what came before. Then, along with the bitter herbs, loaves of flatbread—remember, everything had to be unleavened—loaves of flatbread would be broken and distributed, and then dipped into a thick paste made of ground fruit and nuts...think "chips and dip." Why that? Well, the contrast of the *bitterness* of the bitter herbs and the *sweetness* of the fruit dip—that was a picture of God's deliverance from the bitterness of slavery to the redemption that He was providing them as He led them toward the land that He promised.

Next came singing: the first two psalms from the section of psalms that is known as the "Hallel"—that's Psalms 113 through 118, so the first two of them were 113 and 114—they sang those psalms, and then the group drank the second cup of the wine. If you wonder what "Hallel" means—"Hallel" means "praise"; it's the root of "*Hallelujah*," which is "Praise Jehovah," or, "Praise the Lord."

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And in conjunction with those two songs—and you might want to go read Psalm 113 and 114; you'll see how it ties in—the head of the household would explain to everyone present, and all the guests, the meaning of the Passover (Ex. 12:27).

Then came the main course. And remember: this was all done in a very leisurely, relaxed kind of way, so it would take time. The main course consisted of the roasted lamb and unleavened bread. Everyone's hands were washed again—symbolically. Then, the head of the household distributed pieces of the unleavened bread to be eaten with the lamb. So the leader would take the bread and break it and give it to people. Does that sound a little familiar? This might be where it came from!

After the main course was finished, the third cup of wine was shared around the table. The traditional ceremony, then—and you would have been stringing this out, as I say, very leisurely, a couple of hours—it would conclude with singing the rest of the "Hallel" songs: Psalms 115, 116, 117 and 118. And then, they would drink the fourth cup of the wine.

Now, putting together what we've been studying—and you know Judas is a big deal in this whole scenario—Judas left before the entire meal was completed. We know that he stayed through the dipping of the bread in the paste made of the crushed fruit, and Judas used that as his opportunity to slip out; and remember the pretense, and how they thought he was going to give alms to the poor or do something on behalf of all of them (Jn. 13:29). Well, he knew the custom of Jesus from that time—all the days that they had been in Jerusalem—he knew that Jesus was almost certainly going to stop off at the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Maybe Jesus had even *said* that—we don't know; but we *do* know: Jesus *hid* the location of the Passover meal from Judas so that Judas couldn't make *that* the place that he would betray Jesus and He would be arrested. Jesus is in control of every single detail of that night. But Judas slipped out and made the pretense of taking care of business; but in fact, what he did is, he scurried across town to the chief priests; he wanted to alert them and their forces to the opportunity that they were going to have to arrest Jesus in the garden.

After Judas left, that's when Jesus transformed the "Passover" into the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 10:21)—also called "the Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:20), or also called "Communion" because we commune with each other and celebrate our communion with the Lord (see 1 Cor. 10:16). So that night, in this meal, Jesus signaled the transition from the Old Covenant to the New. Jesus's words recorded in this passage mark the end of all Old Testament symbols and sacrifices and holidays and rituals (Heb. 8:13).

All the symbols of the Old Covenant pointed to Christ (Col. 2:16-17): The tabernacle pointed to Christ, the Passover lambs pointed to Christ, all the bulls and rams pointed to Christ, the priesthood pointed to Christ—all of *that* pointed to Christ; and in His death and His resurrection, all those things—all those pictures and types and prophecies—were *fulfilled* and *replaced* (see Matt. 5:17). When "the veil in the temple was torn in two" (Mk. 15:38)—remember: Friday afternoon—that's when the Old Covenant was rendered obsolete.

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So that's the Passover meal. I want to do one more thing today. Again: this passage is going to pretty much interpret itself when we get there; you won't have a problem with the verses that we're going to look at. But I'd like to give you a look at the institution of the Lord's Supper in the perspective of the "big picture" of the Bible, and I'd like to have you get planted in your mind a couple things that will help you with understanding how to interpret the Bible in its "big picture." You need to see the balance between two aspects of truth about the Doctrine of Revelation and about the Bible itself: You need to pay attention, simultaneously, to *continuity* within the Bible, and *discontinuity* within the Bible.

Let me flesh that out a little bit. One important principle that you have heard us mention before is the concept of "Progressive Revelation." From beginning to the end, the Bible is one seamless unveiling of the plan of God, from Creation to ultimate Consummation; and there is steady progress along the way. The Bible doesn't move from wrong to right or bad to good, but it *does* move from incomplete to complete.

I've always said it this way: If you have only the Book of Genesis, you would have in your hand the inspired, inerrant Word of God—but it isn't the *complete* Word of God. Genesis is the headwaters of *many* rivers of doctrine that flow through the whole Bible and then finally come together in the end, in the fulfillment. But there is tremendous *progress* in unveiling the plan of God. Add to Genesis the Book of Exodus—well, that's a whopper! We get Israel out of Egypt, we have the Passover, we have the Tabernacle, we have the Ten Commandments, we have the beginning of the giving of the Law. Add in Leviticus—a whole bunch more details about that. Then you add the rest of the "Torah"—or, the Books of Moses, those first five books—and that's a lot!

Ah, but then there's another whole section of your Bible! The next twelve books are books of history: Joshua through Esther; and you see *more* of the development of the plan of God, and how He worked with Israel, and Israel's good days and their bad days, and all that God did with them, and the developing of a kingdom, and all of those things. But then *even more* is made known in the next five books: the books of Poetry, or, the books of Wisdom literature—that's Job through Song of Solomon; and you see a lot revealed there about God's practical wisdom, His moral law revealed in details in a lot of those things. And then, a *lot more* is made known of His plan as you read through the next five books that we call the Major Prophets: Isaiah through Daniel. *You've got a lot there*—a lot confronting the spiritual issues within Israel, but a lot looking *forward* to the Messiah and His kingdom and His sacrifice, and all of that. But you *still* wouldn't have the full story of *everything* leading *up to* Messiah, until you include the twelve books of the Minor Prophets.

So, what you have in your hand that has the adjective "Old" in front of it—the Old Testament or Old Covenant—consists of 39 books, the way we measure and count the books in English: Five books of law, twelve books of history, five books of poetry, five Major Prophets, and twelve Minor Prophets. And if you're going to accurately interpret any passage in the Bible, you need to pay attention to where it fits in the progressive revelation of God. For example: Adam and Eve were promised a Redeemer, but you know what? They had never read Isaiah 53—it hadn't been written yet! So there's a lot of progress, a lot of things that are filled in.

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Now, after those 39 books that we call the Old Testament, or, Old Covenant, there were 400 years of revelatory silence, meaning: there were no inspired books given by God to cover that time. But then, the Old Covenant—the era of the Law, all of that stuff together—it is brought to its culmination with the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The last four books of your Bible under the Old Covenant are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. You say, "Well, wait a second! Those are in *my* Bible under the *new* part!" Okay. After the 400 years of silence, the coming of Messiah—*great big deal*. Those four books record Jesus's life and ministry, culminating in His death and resurrection.

The rest of your Bible is, in some ways, parallel to the Old Testament; there are other books that continue the progress of the unfolding of the fullness of the revelation of God. In the New Testament, it's not twelve books of history, it's one book of history: the Book of Acts. That's followed by 21 "epistles," or, letters—13 of them from the Apostle Paul, 8 of them we generally lump under the expression "General Epistles." And then it concludes with one book of prophecy.

So, 39 books in the Old Testament, 27 books in the New Testament—it is all one continuous connected story, progressing from beginning to end, from incomplete to complete. And it's crucial that you understand the amazing *continuity* of the Bible—how it holds together so amazingly well, even though it's written by 40 different authors over a 1,500 year span in three different languages. It's astounding! (see Lk. 24:44; Acts 15:15; 26:22; cf. Is. 46:10)

But that's only *part* of the picture. You also need to understand the elements of *discontinuity* within your Bible, because our passage today is going to deal with one of those points of *discontinuity*. Woven into that progress of revelation are several important *changes*—you might say: from one era to another. What are we talking about when we think about changes from era to era within the Bible? Well, the first one comes early: you get two really cool chapters, and then a major *bummer* in Genesis Chapter 3—the Fall. Things were very different *after* Adam and Eve fell than they were before that, and more revelation was given. Then, the next big one: things were very different before and after the Flood; and you might lump together with that, not only the judgment in the Flood, but then, the judgment of the scattering of the people and the confusion of the languages at the Tower of Babel—big point of change going on there.

Things were very different before and after God gave the Law through Moses. The Law was a *great big deal*; it regulated worship in Israel, it had several elements to it that helped keep Israel distinct and apart from all of the other nations. That very long period of the era of Law is what covers most of the pages of the Old Testament. Then there's a *whopper* of a change: before and after Jesus; things were *very different*, starting with the Incarnation. Jesus was the fulfillment of all of those pictures, the reality of all of those shadows, the point of all of those types, and the fulfillment of all the prophecies. All of those countless sacrifices under the Mosaic Law, including all the Passovers that started before the Law—all of that pointed to Jesus's once-for-all, satisfactory sacrifice to make atonement for sins (Heb. 10:10, 14).

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With the arrival of Jesus, you now have the nation of Israel being set aside (Rom. 11:25-26). Israel was the *center* of *all* of that stuff before this. *All* the revelation came through Israel; it was through Israel that the Messiah was to come (Jn. 4:22), exactly as spelled out in the Old Testament. But *now*, Israel is set aside, and the main group through which God is working today is the Church—and it is *not* Israel. It includes all genetic Israelites *and* all Gentiles—all Jews and Gentiles who share in common that they are trusting in the finished work of Christ for salvation. Jew and Gentile together? Unknown in the Old Testament; but now, together, united in one body: the Church (Eph. 2:13-16; 3:5-6). That's the era in which we live.

There's going to be *another* huge change: There will come a day when the Church will be taken from the earth in the Rapture—all believers snatched away at one moment. That's going to be followed by the "70th Week of Daniel," or, seven tumultuous years that we call the Tribulation, that lead up to the Second Coming. Remember all the way back to the chapter before this? We looked at that in the Olivet Discourse.

Then comes *another* big change to *another* new era. The Second Coming of Christ brings the next-to-last big change: He sets up His kingdom on Earth for "a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4-6; cf. Matt. 19:28). At the end of that thousand years, there's a final judgment at what is called the "Great White Throne"—that's recorded in Revelation Chapter 20, Verses 11 through 15.

And then, the final big change is when the heavens and the earth, as we know them, are all destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10), and the "new heaven" and the "new earth" and the "new Jerusalem" (Rev. 21:1-2) are unveiled, where all the redeemed will be with the Lord for eternity—the last two chapters of your Bible. You've got two *really good* chapters on the front; you've got two *really nice* chapters on the end—*what a mess* in between, in all the rest of it! That's where we live. This is the unfolding plan of Redemption through which God will get Himself glory (see Is. 43:7; Rom. 11:36; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 1:5-6, 14).

In that seamless continuity of God's revelation, there *are* these points of significant change; so that's why I say: pay attention to continuity *and* discontinuity—they're *both* very real factors that you have to understand. For example: you can't take something from the era of the kingdom and read it back into the time of Israel in the wilderness; they don't fit, they're not addressing the same thing.

But at every change-point, you need to understand: continuity doesn't stop; always, there are things carried over from one era into the next. God's nature *never* changes (Mal. 3:6), so: God's morality *never* changes; what is right or wrong never changes, from one era into another. *Never* is anyone saved by the works of the Law; salvation is by grace through faith; the method of salvation never changes (see Rom. 4:2-12). Now, was it regulated differently, expressed differently, in the time before the Law and after the Law? Yes. Is it expressed differently now, in this era of the Church? Yes. But, God never changes, and so there are always things that are carried over, *but* there are always things *left behind*. There are always things nullified, and there are always new things revealed at all of those points of change.

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Now, here's something else I want you to get: It's also important to realize that these changes—I call them change-points—these changes from era to era are not always immediate. Some of them are, but most of them involve a period of transition. The first change was abrupt and dramatic: Adam and Eve got up one morning in the Garden, and by nightfall, they were expelled; that was a quickie.

But the change from before the Flood to after the Flood—how long did *that* take? Well, they were on the Ark for over a year. How much led up to that? 120 years of "Noah" as "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5), building the Ark and, obviously, giving a message of righteousness, even though it was rejected by all but him and his family. So, that was a long, slow change. The era to the Law of Moses took a couple of months; the Passover—the last night in Egypt and the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed it—from there until Israel got to Mount Sinai was a couple of months. And then, remember: Moses was up on the mountain for 40 days; Aaron and ones down below didn't do so hot during those 40 days. But that was a time of transition from one important era to another.

You can argue that the 33 years of the life of Jesus—the whole thing, in a sense, was a period of transition. He came to...Israel, right? He came to His own things that He created, and His *own people* rejected Him (Jn. 1:11). That playing-out of Him offering them the kingdom, and them rejecting it—that's a *huge deal*, and it leads to the revelation that Israel is going to be set aside (Lk. 19:44; cf. Matt. 21:43; 23:39). Jesus was constantly talking of the fulfillment of the Law; He was constantly exposing how the leaders of the Jews at that time had corrupted God's wonderful Law into a works-righteousness system (Prov. 30:12; Lk. 18:9). He was inviting them, inviting them, inviting them, but they were rejecting, rejecting, rejecting.

There was a spectacular, *dramatic* point of change when, the day after our text for today—remember, the "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Mk. 15:38) while Jesus was on the Cross; that was a *big deal*. Only the High Priest could go behind that veil, only once a year, only after a very prescribed series of sacrifices; and now, it's as if saying: "Anybody can come!" Or, as Jesus put it: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest...for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29; NASB and throughout, unless otherwise noted). But even at *that*, there was *another* 40 days of transition and waiting, and then Jesus met with the disciples.

Then came a big change when He ascended to the Father, but they still had to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon believers on the Day of Pentecost. But, the change *still* wasn't complete; it took some time for all of those trappings of the Old Covenant to be done away with, and for the New Covenant to really be fully established. Oh, but, you know what? It's *not* fully established yet, because *Israel* hasn't put themselves under the New Covenant yet.

The Book of Acts records a span of about 40 years of the infancy of this new era of Jew and Gentile united in Christ by faith—something unheard of before that. But this new thing was *beginning* while the old thing was still *languishing*! The Book of Hebrews is the theological parallel to the Book of Acts—the Book of Acts is the *historical* record of the transition; the Book of Hebrews is the *theological* record of the transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant.

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Think of it like a relay race at a track meet: As one runner nears the end of his leg of the race, the next one starts running; and within a certain designated distance, the baton is passed; momentarily, both of them are touching the baton, but the first runner comes to a stop while the next one goes all-out to finish his leg of the race. The baton shows the continuity. The runners illustrate the discontinuity. Now, unlike when I ran relay races, God never drops the baton; the continuity is intact, but different parts for different eras.

Now, in A.D. 70, when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, that was a strong exclamation point on the end of the Old Covenant. Jesus said it "will be taken away from you" (Matt. 21:43). Paul explained how that is going to be for a time, "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25). But Israel is set aside, and the Church is now sprinting through the era in which we live. The next change is going to be a *spectacular* one, and a *very quick* one. I know *exactly* how long it's going to take: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52), the Church is going to be removed from the earth. We saw what comes after that in Mark 13, the Olivet Discourse.

Now, these different eras in the redemptive plan of God are usually called "dispensations." I didn't use that word at the beginning, just to make sure that I didn't have people injecting their own ideas of what that means. The word "dispensation" comes from a translation of a Greek word that occurs only a couple of times in the New Testament, but it basically means: "the order of the house." The rules of the house change from one era to the next. Yeah, but the Owner of the house is still the same—morality never changes, but there *are* things that change as you move from one to the other. So if you've ever wondered what "dispensations" are, you've got a pretty good idea. Now, people argue over how many dispensations there are, how many facets there are to the different transitions, and all of that. But don't worry about that. If it was all that crystal-clear, there would be a chapter of the Bible that says, "This is how many dispensations there are." But we can see this: the continuity, and the discontinuity within that continuity.

Now, the crucial signals of change from one dispensation to another are sometimes very visible. What we have before us in our text for today is the signal of the huge change from the dispensation of the Law to the current dispensation. This transition was not completed in one night, when Jesus ate the Passover. I've been arguing for saying His *whole life* was a part of that transition. But, on the night of the Passover, Jesus *signaled* this transition very dramatically: He made an astounding announcement of the transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant—specifically using that terminology: "New Covenant"—when He introduced this new celebration.

Now, believe it or not, we are going to get to our text. These words are going to be very familiar to you if you have been a believer very long. We have the institution of the "Lord's Supper," which we celebrate throughout this era, throughout this dispensation. Here's where we're going: Mark 14, Verses 22 through 26. Jesus is going to say: "This Is My Body." He's going to say: "This Is My Blood." And without using the exact words, He's going to show us: "This Is My Plan."

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So we start with: "This Is My Body." Mark 14:22—"While they were eating"—well, *now* you know, this fits in the flow of that evening of the Lord's Supper; it was probably toward close of the whole time—probably during the eating of the main course. "While they were eating, He took some bread"—which the leader of the Passover always did, breaking pieces of the bread and giving it to teach one around the table to eat along with the lamb—"and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said"—not what they had *ever heard before*—"Take it; this is My body."

So, Jesus takes a piece of unleavened bread, gives thanks, breaks it into pieces for the consumption of all of them. He was about to initialize a symbolic way to remember that He came and took on humanity to allow His body to be sacrificed for us (see Heb. 2:14-17). Just as the lambs of the Passover had to be flawless (Ex. 12:5), the perfect sacrifice had to be flawless, sinless, perfect (1 Pet. 1:19; 3:18; cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26; 9:14). He came and took on humanity that He might be that sacrifice (Heb. 2:9; cf. Is. 53:10-11; Matt. 20:28).

Now, that is a *brilliant* symbol. Just as desperately as we need food for our bodies, our souls need a Savior. And Jesus Christ, in His death on our behalf, is the way that that salvation comes. Jesus had earlier called Himself "the bread of life" (Jn. 6:35). He had also called Himself "the door of the sheep" (Jn. 10:7). Now, He's talking about being "the Passover Lamb" (Mk. 14:12; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). He's also "the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12). Elsewhere, He's called the "morning star" (Rev. 22:16), the "chief corner stone" (Matt. 21:42), and "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). So Jesus *shockingly*—almost 1,500 years, in how many countless thousands of families had the Passover been celebrated...nobody had *ever* said: "Here's a piece of bread; this is My body." It was a huge deal.

Now, He says it represents Himself. Sadly, a lot of theological junk has accumulated around this simple, beautiful imagery. Jesus did not actually turn that bread into His flesh. He was *there*, physically! His body was literal, the bread was literal, but He wasn't saying that there was some—as Calvin of "Calvin and Hobbes" would say: some sort of "transmogrification" of that. The bread was a *symbol*. Jesus did not say, "Here—each bite off a finger." He wasn't talking about a *literal* transformation. He used *symbols* to instruct and explain (see Jn. 6:27, 33, 55; cf. Matt. 16:5-12).

Neither is there some mystical "presence" to the bread of Communion. It's *bread*—whatever recipe you use! Some insist on unleavened bread, some don't. It doesn't really matter. It doesn't say, "You must use this certain kind of bread." The point is: it's not transformed mystically into something, it's a beautiful *symbol*; and along with the cup, it pictures Jesus's Incarnation and His death—all of that for the purpose of buying your redemption (Jn. 6:51).

Now, we have Matthew's record of this, Mark's record of this, and Luke's record of this. John majors on the *teaching* of that night; he doesn't give a formula for Communion, like the others do. But then, interestingly, it's *also* recorded, in its most *thorough* version, in First Corinthians Chapter 11, because the church in Corinth kind of *muffed* it, and they were making it into more like: "Hey, there's some bread and wine by the door—help yourself on the way out, if you want to." They weren't getting it right, so that's why there's that later revelation to correct that.

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Mark writes that Jesus said: "Take it; this is My body," but He *also* said: "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Lk. 22:19). He was saying: "Everything that all those sacrifices were—now it's Me that you need to remember." (cf. Col. 2:17) First Corinthians 11:26 says every time you do this, "You proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." This is how we remember and we celebrate *who* Jesus is, and what He did to redeem us.

I like to point out the emphasis on the pronouns in First Corinthians Chapter 11, but also in the Gospels: they are *emphatic*. He says: "Do this in remembrance of *Me*," and the "Me" is an emphatic form of the pronoun. He meant it to be a *huge contrast!* Nearly 1,500 years of Passovers, all remembering that *spectacular deliverance* from slavery in Egypt that God granted to His people Israel—and *now*, He's changing it. Nearly 2,000 years, now, of celebrating the Lord's Supper—it's all about, *not* an earthly deliverance; it's about the ultimate *spiritual* deliverance from sin through Jesus Christ, and Him alone. "This is *My* body...Do this in remembrance of *Me*."

Next thing: "This Is My Blood." Verse 23—"And when He had taken a cup and given thanks"—which cup? We don't know, and it doesn't matter. *Probably* the third or the fourth cup, *most likely* the third. And if you want to argue about it, fine; I don't really care. The point is: "He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it." So it's communal, all participating in it. "And He said to them, 'This is *My* blood' "—again, strong pronoun—" 'My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.' "

"Drink from it, all of you" (Matt. 26:27)—that's part of the fullness of the explanations that we get from the passages in which this is recorded. Jesus wants you to remember Him. He wants you to celebrate Him by doing this. It's *vital*. He's saying: "This is, to your soul, as important as eating and drinking is to your body." "This is My blood *of the covenant*." It means that, that little cup you drink—or, if you want to be *really* apostolic about it, that little sip you take from the chalice that is passed around—represents Jesus shedding His blood (Heb. 9:22b). It represents His death (see Col. 1:20, 22). And you know what? He says: "This is My blood *of the covenant*"—and He said that, just as if He expected them to know what He meant by "the covenant." What covenant? The covenant of God! You've been under the Old Covenant—this is going to be the blood of "the New Covenant" (1 Cor. 11:25). His death is crucial to bringing the blessings of the New Covenant (see Heb. 9:15; 11:40)!

He says: "This is My blood." It's not the blood in His veins, or He would have pricked a finger and given each person a drop of blood. It wasn't the blood in His veins that was so special or different; it's that *He* was special, *He* was different, *He* was sinless, *He* was flawless, *He* was the perfect Lamb of God (see 1 Pet. 1:19); and so, Him giving His life, Him laying down His life in your stead—that is efficacious to pay the death penalty that you owe your sins (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23a). Like Second Corinthians 5:21 says: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." So He's saying: "Shedding *My* blood—*My* death—that's what brings this in." "Shedding blood" is a Hebrew euphemism for the sacrifice of death (e.g. Gen. 9:6; Num. 35:33; Ezek. 22:27; Matt. 23:35).

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"Blood of the covenant"—the New Covenant, promised in Jeremiah 31:31 through 34, also mentioned in Ezekiel 36 and 38. It's the promise that God will redeem Israel someday; it's the promise that He will take away the sins of His people. It's a promise of a glorious New Covenant—"Not like the covenant which...they broke," He says (Jer. 31:32), but a new one.

Now, when you harmonize the four Gospels and the record of this in First Corinthians 11, you know that's what Jesus meant. And in the Book of Hebrews, the point is made: Even though Israel is not yet redeemed, we have the spiritual benefits of salvation right now that will one day be part of the New Covenant between God and a *believing* nation of Israel. Think all the way back to the chapter before this—we talked about how that will come to pass toward the end of that Tribulation time; after two thirds of Israel has died (Zech. 13:8), the remaining one third will turn to the Messiah (vs. 9).

Ah, but here's something interesting: That's a great promise—a not-yet-completely-fulfilled-promise—*but*, our ministry in *this* era is a New Covenant ministry. We have the salvific benefits of the New Covenant which are not yet realized within Israel, to whom the New Covenant is promised. How do I know that? Well, Paul said it. In Second Corinthians Chapter 3, Verses 5 and 6, he says: "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant"—and then he makes a contrast—"not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Compare that with a bunch of other Scriptures and you understand: the Law exposes sin (Rom. 3:20). Read the book of Galatians. And having your sin exposed drives you to understand that you need a Savior who can take away your sin (see Gal. 3:24). So, the Spirit brings new life by faith (Jn. 3:5; 6:63).

So, for now—starting that night—the Passover is *out*. To celebrate the Passover today—in the traditional sense, the Old Testament Passover—that would be to ignore that the Lamb of God has come (see 1 Cor. 5:7). *Now* the appropriate celebration is the Lord's Supper. The Passover looked back to that earthly redemption that God provided for Israel from Egypt, but this reminds us of the *greater* Redeemer—the *perfect* Redeemer, the *ultimate* Redeemer. As the lambs of the Passover were slain by the *thousands* every year, *big contrast*: Jesus gave His life once; not once for each family—once, "once for all" (Heb. 10:10). So now, we come to this Table and we look back to what Jesus did for us, to purchase our redemption. All those lambs were all illustrations pointing *to* the Lamb of God. *This* is an illustration looking *back to* the Lamb of God.

So, pretty simple: "This Is My Body." "This Is My Blood." Very quickly: "This Is My Plan." Verse 25—Jesus says: "Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." So here's part of the spectacular *continuity* of all of this! The plan is for us to continually celebrate the Lord's Supper *until* we begin a *similar* celebration with Jesus in His kingdom, *after* two more changes in the dispensation of things. Now, how wonderful is *that* going to be? I mean, just sitting and eating with Jesus would be wonderful on *any* occasion! Imagine the joy of eating and drinking with the Lord Himself, in His kingdom, around *this* Table!

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Now remember, I mentioned last time: in the Millennial Kingdom, there will be memorial sacrifices (see Ezek. 43:18); that's inferred by this text and the parallels in Matthew and Luke and First Corinthians; but there's also going to be, at that time, a memorial Passover celebration (Ezek. 45:21-24) to remember that "Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). It's hard to fathom what it will be like to be with Jesus, remembering *with* Him what He accomplished in order for us to be able to be with Him in the "new heaven" and the "new earth" (see Rev. 21:1-5, 27; cf. 2 Pet. 3:13).

Mark then adds one little simple note to let us know that this was the traditional Passover meal, and it concluded in the traditional way; and he's going to set the stage for what is to come next. Verse 26—"After singing a hymn"—that would have been the last of the "Hallel" psalms—"they went out to the Mount of Olives." That's where we're going to pick it up, Lord willing, next Lord's Day.

But before we leave, we want to come to the Table. Apply the text to your own life. Examine yourself. We're told to do that in Second Corinthians 13:5—"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!" We're told in First Corinthians 11: When you come to the Table, examine yourself (vs. 28)! Don't celebrate what takes away sin if you have unconfessed sin (see Prov. 28:13). Do you realize your own hopelessness apart from Christ? Are you trusting in Him, and nothing else, to save you? This is the celebration for all who have that kind of faith.

And even if you believe, I know you stumble, I know you sin (Jas. 3:2)—but, is your allegiance first and foremost to Jesus Christ? In our uncertain world, it may even come to the point that, just something as simple as this could be life-threatening, if people are going to be standing outside taking names as we leave. Are you willing to come to this Table, saying: "I trust in Jesus Christ and nothing else, and in Him alone, that I might be with Him for eternity"?

This shows you belong to Christ. It's a way we symbolize it. You can do it as a phony—not a good idea. The passage in First Corinthians 11 says you eat and drink "judgment" to yourself, if you come to this in a flippant kind of way (vs. 29). But as you come to this Table, ask yourself: "Will I stand firm?" This is not *just* a ritual that we do once a month; this is an important thing. And will you join me as we remember and celebrate and proclaim Christ?

Let's pray:

Our Father, how we thank You for the glorious riches of Your grace. And as we come to this Table that is before us, we thank You for what is here. We thank You for the bread, because it represents the body, the incarnation, the humanity, of our wonderful Lord Jesus. We thank You for the cup, because it reminds us of, and represents, His death on our behalf. And just as that blood of all those lambs had to be applied to those doorposts that night in Egypt, His blood—spiritually speaking—is applied on us, that we might stand complete in Him. So we thank You for the privilege to celebrate this, in Jesus' name. Amen.