

Take and Eat

The Cross (Part 4)

Mark 14:22-26 (Mt.26:26-30, Lk.22:15-20, 1 Cor.11:23-26) 4/9/2021

Hook: Why do some verses in the Bible make our relationship with God sound conditional, and other verses make it sound unconditional? The answer to that question is the key to understanding the gospel and having the closest, most intimate relationship with God possible.

Introduction.....	1
The Bread.....	2
Passover.....	2
This is My Body.....	2
Transforming the Passover.....	2
Body.....	3
The Cup.....	4
Sacrifice.....	5
Why This Waste?.....	5
Covenant.....	5
Exodus 24:6.....	6
Zechariah 9.....	6
Covenant of Love.....	6
God's Side.....	8
Our Side.....	8
1 Ingestion.....	9
2 Co-Suffering.....	10
3 Remembering.....	10
4 Gratitude.....	11
Conclusion: If Only We Could Do What Mary Did.....	11
Harmony.....	11
Summary.....	12

Mark 14:22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.

25 "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God."

26 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Introduction

What's the difference between your relationship with the guy taking your order at MacDonald's and your relationship with a police officer? And how does that compare to your relationship with your next-door neighbor? We have a lot of different kinds of relationships, don't we?

And each one is appropriate for its own context. Think of a business owner who has a "the customer is always right" business model. You come in as a customer, make your argument for why you should get your money back, he isn't one bit convinced, but he smiles and says, "Yes sir. Would you like cash, or back on your card?" You have a customer-vendor kind of relationship with him, so you're always

right. If that business owner's best friend came to him with that same argument you made, he would tell his friend, "That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard." But with you, he smiles and agrees.

Which kind of relationship is better? He doesn't capitulate to everything his best friend says like he does with you, but on the other hand, his best friend is welcome in his home—at his dinner table. As a customer, you're never invited to his home.

And as I said, there are hundreds of different kinds of relationships. There's the landlord-tenant relationship, a student-teacher relationship, a mother-daughter relationship, a voter-congressman relationship—I could go on forever. Of all the different kinds of relationships, which is the best kind to have with God, and why?

The Bread

Mark 14:22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

Passover

The verse begins, "While they were eating." Eating what? The Passover. Mark has made that very clear. So far in this chapter he has reminded us no less than 5 times. This was the Passover meal, Passover, Passover, Passover, Passover. Four of those were in the preceding paragraph. Mark doesn't include many details, so the fact that he reminds us 4 times in one paragraph that this was a Passover meal makes me think that's important.

The Passover was the annual celebration of the greatest act of salvation God had ever done—the deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt into the promised land, which is the place of God's presence and blessing. Every since mankind was banished from the Garden of Eden, one of the most prominent themes in the whole Bible is God bringing his people back from their remote, estranged condition back into the place of his presence and blessing. That's why the Bible ends in the book of Revelation with God's people back in paradise eating from the tree of life.

There are countless times God delivered his people, but none greater than the deliverance from Pharaoh, and so God commanded his people to have a yearly feast as a remembrance, so they would never forget.

But it wasn't just a remembrance. It also looked forward. The people knew that when a handful of Jews came back from the 70-year exile in Babylon, that wasn't anywhere close to the glorious restoration the prophets had promised. They realized that even though they were back in the land, they hadn't been restored. So they looked forward to the day of the ultimate exodus—the ultimate, final deliverance of God's people when he would bring them back to the full-blown paradise of God and they would feast at the great messianic banquet forever.

And it's at that yearly remembrance where we left off last time with Jesus and his disciples reclining at the table enjoying that feast together.¹

This is My Body

Transforming the Passover

So while they were eating the Passover meal, Jesus took the bread and said, "This is ...". Now, if Jesus had paused right then and the disciples had to finish his sentence, they would have said, "Oh, that's

¹ If you've been to a Passover seder, you know you could write a whole book on all the elements in that meal that point to Christ. However, those traditions arose hundreds of years after the time of Jesus. We don't know how they celebrated the Passover in Jesus' time. For that reason, I won't comment on the elements of the celebration (i.e., which of the four cups Jesus blessed, etc.). Nor do I have time in this study to review all that other passages say about communion, which is considerable. There is only time to cover what Mark says and a little of the Old Testament background.

easy.” When God gave instructions on how to celebrate the Passover in Deuteronomy 16, he said exactly what the bread means.

Deuteronomy 16:3 ... eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction ... so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt.

That’s what they had heard all their life, and so in this moment they fully expect Jesus to break the bread and say, “This is the bread of affliction.” So it must have rattled them when Jesus went off script.

Mark 14:22 ... Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this² is ... my body.”

For 1500 years it’s been the bread of affliction; now it’s something else. I don’t have anything I can compare this to because there are no traditions in our culture that have been going for 1500 years. Our whole country has on been here a couple hundred years. And the traditions we do have are not institutions delivered by God and ratified with miracles on Mount Sinai. I don’t know how you could overstate what a monumental thing it was for a single man in a room with his friends to utter a sentence and fundamentally transform the most important holiday in all of human history. But he did it. With a single sentence, the bread stopped pointing to the affliction during the Exodus and started pointing to Jesus’ body.³

Body

He could have said, “This is my presence,” or “This is my love,” or “This is my Spirit,” or even “This is me.” But he said, “my body.” There’s only one other time in Mark when Jesus spoke of his body, and it’s just a few verses before this, and it had to do with his impending death. It’s back in v.8, where the woman poured perfume on his head, and Jesus says, “When she did that, she was anointing my body for burial.”⁴

All through the gospel Jesus has used bread as a metaphor of what he came to give to his people. We don’t have time to review it all now, but it’s a lot. The feeding of the Jewish multitude, the feeding of the Gentile multitude, the comment about how the disciples’ hearts were hardened because they didn’t understand about the bread, the scene in the boat where Jesus gives them the most extensive rebuke he ever gave them because they still didn’t understand about him being the bread. They took his words about bread literally, and so they totally missed the point of the metaphor. And the Catholic church makes that same mistake with communion.⁵ It’s not meant to be literal—it’s a metaphor. In John, Jesus

² Some have pointed out the fact that the word “this” is neuter and “bread” is masculine and have concluded that Jesus must have meant something other than the bread. But the neuter singular of “this” was regularly used just to mean “this thing,” referring to any inanimate entity. Jesus doesn’t use the word, “bread” orally. He simply picks it up and says, “This is my body.” Whether in Greek or Aramaic, he would have had no verbal antecedent from previous speech, so the neuter form is exactly what we would expect.

³ There is no explicit statement in Mark’s account that Jesus’ followers are to repeat the Lord’s supper as a lasting ordinance. In Luke’s account, Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” But, as usual, Mark would rather show us than tell us. So he communicates the same thing simply by placing this in the context of the Passover, which was a feast of remembrance. Communion is the new Passover.

⁴ When Mary anointed Jesus with perfume, it says she put it on his head. But when Jesus explains the meaning of her action in the next verse, instead of saying, “She poured perfume on my head,” he says, “She poured perfume on my body to prepare it for burial.” She didn’t rub the perfume all over his body as would have been done in a real embalming, but Jesus uses the word “body” instead of “head” to draw attention to the idea of embalming. So the word sticks out, and by placing it this close in the context, Mark expects the reader to make the connection. When Jesus says, “This is my body,” we should remember that he had just spoken of his body in the context of death and burial.

And the fact that it’s in the context of a memorial remembrance (Passover) would also imply his death. The only other time Jesus’ body is mentioned in mark is also in the context of his burial (15:43).

⁵ Blood has been spilt in the arguments in the church over how literally we should take the words, “This is my body.” In the Catholic system, communion is seen as a means of receiving saving grace, and they take the words to mean the bread and wine are literally transformed into the actual, physical body and blood of Jesus (although they miraculously retain the taste and feel of bread and wine). The reformers rejected this idea, but within the Reformation there was still fighting over the meaning. Luther

preached a whole sermon about him as the bread from heaven, the bread of life. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. BET = house LEHEM = bread Jesus was born in the house of bread, he's the bread of life who is our sustenance, who satisfies our appetites, sustains our lives, and is the staple of our existence.

And now, by referring to his body, Jesus is connecting all that to his death.⁶

The Cup

So at this point, each of the disciples have a piece of bread in their hand. Some of them pop it in their mouth just like they always did at Passover. Others are just holding it, looking at it and back to Jesus, trying to grasp what he was saying. Maybe all the comments about his death are finally starting to sink in a little bit. And in the silence of the moment, Jesus does something else.

23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

They all drank from Jesus' cup. What would that have meant to them? No doubt it would have called to their minds Jesus' words from a few days earlier when James and John wanted the highest seats in the kingdom and Jesus said:

Mark 10:38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink? ... 39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink ..."

And now, here they all are drinking from Jesus' cup. People always talk about the bread and wine of communion, but wine is actually never mentioned in any of the communion passages. It's implied, but the word is never used. It's never "bread and wine." It's always, "the bread and the *cup*."

The imagery of the cup is more than just what's inside it. Drinking the cup is a picture of undergoing the suffering God has planned for you. Just a few verses later Jesus will mention his cup again.

Mark 14:36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me."

Drinking from Jesus' cup symbolizes participation in his suffering.⁷ I think some of the disciples' hands may have been trembling at this point—not because they were worried about spilling some of Jesus' symbolic blood on the floor, but because they might have started to grasp some of the signifi-

and the German theologians took a stance similar to the Catholic one in which Jesus' body was present in the elements, but only in a spiritual way, not a physical way.

Other Protestants rejected even Luther's view, claiming the disciples would not have taken the words that way because Jesus' physical body was right there reclining at the table. And Jesus himself was clear that the supper is a remembrance ("Do this in remembrance of me.") just as the Passover was a remembrance.

When God said the bread of the Passover was the bread of affliction, no one took that to mean it was the actual, literal bread that the ancient Hebrews had in their bondage in Egypt. Calling it the bread of affliction clearly mean it was bread that represented the ancient bread of affliction.

This is a very common way of speaking. You draw a little map on the ground and say, "This little rock is the gas station. This stick is the King Soopers." No one takes that to mean the rock is literally the gas station. Even little children understand this way of speaking. They draw a picture and point to a little stick figure and say, "This is mom." They point to a scribble and say, "This is the sun." It's a very natural, very common way of speaking—using a symbol to represent something and saying, "This *is* that."

Jesus frequently used symbolical language (Mark 8:15; John 2:19; 3:3; 4:14,32; 6:51,53-56; 11:11). In each of these instances, Jesus rebukes those who take the figures literally. If something is intended as a metaphor, then to take it literally is to miss the point.

⁶ Some people point to the breaking of the bread and take that as a description of what would happen to Jesus' body. But that's not the point of the breaking.

First of all, Jesus' body never was broken. When they broke the other guy's legs but not Jesus' legs, John 19:36 says that was to fulfill the Scriptures that said the Passover lamb's bones were not to be broken. In the old KJV it says, "This is my body which is broken for you," but that's from a bad reading that was added by some scribe. It wasn't in the original.

The breaking of bread was a common act of fellowship. They broke the bread because that's how you served bread. You've heard the phrase, "The best things since sliced bread"? What was the best thing prior to sliced bread? Answer: broken bread. That's just how they served it.

⁷ The word "cup" is used this way in Psalm 11:6. "**On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their cup.**"

cance of what it meant to drink Jesus' cup. Especially when he made it clear it would involve the violent shedding of his blood.

Sacrifice

24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.

Whenever the Bible uses this word in the context of human blood being "poured out," it refers to a violent murder.⁸ Jesus hands them the cup and says, "Here drink from my cup—the one where I'll be murdered with a lot of violent bloodshed."

That's what the word means when it's talking about people. But in the context of the Passover, it would carry another meaning. It's also the word used to describe the shedding of sacrificial blood. When God gave instructions on how to kill the lamb, this is the word that was frequently used—it's blood was to be poured out on the altar.⁹

And there's one place where the word is used in both ways—in the sacrificial sense and referring to a person. It's in Isaiah 53, referring to the suffering servant.

Isaiah 53:12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

I think Jesus meant to call that passage to his disciples' minds. The suffering servant would come and pour out his life unto death, bearing the sins of many. Here Jesus says his blood will be poured out for many. It will be a violent death, and it will be a sacrificial death to bring about redemption. It's the same thing Jesus had said back in chapter 10.

Mark 10:45 For the 'son of man' did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Why This Waste?

Jesus broke the bread and spoke of his blood being poured out. In the previous paragraph we heard those same two words, breaking and pouring out. The woman broke the jar and pour out the perfume. Perhaps Mark wants us to make the verbal connection and see the extravagance of the pouring out of the valuable perfume as a picture of the extravagance of the pouring out of the priceless blood of the Son of God. When the perfume was poured out, the disciples said, "Why this waste?" The same might be asked of the pouring out of Jesus' blood. Why waste the life of Jesus? A young man, early 30's, in the prime of life, just 2 or 3 years into his career. You look at the impact he had in those few years—can you imagine if he would have walked this earth for another 40 years? You see him bleeding out up there on that cross and you think, "What a waste."

Only when you have spiritual insight into the real world can you see that neither the pouring out of the perfume nor the pouring out of Jesus' blood was a waste. What looked like extravagant waste of perfume was really a marvelous display of faith and worship. And what looked like an extravagant waste of Jesus' blood was really the greatest work of salvation in redemptive history.

Covenant

At this point the disciples' minds must have been spinning. So many implications to what Jesus is saying. So much to take in, Jesus' death, their participation in that, sacrifice, Passover, redemption, bread of life. But Jesus isn't done. What he says next was the biggest piece of all. And I say that because of

⁸ Examples: Gn.4:10–11, 9:6; Dt.19:10; 2 Kings 21:16; Psalms 106:38; Jeremiah 7:6; Matthew 23:35.

⁹ See Lev.4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34.

where Mark places it. When Mark wants to really showcase something and make it the grand climax of what he's teaching, where does he place it? In the center. Mark is famous for his "sandwiches"—showcasing his main point by placing it right in the middle of two mirroring ideas. I counted the words in this paragraph, and guess what phrase is in the exact center? It's the phrase "the blood of the covenant which is poured out for many." There are 38 Greek words before that phrase and 38 words after it. That's the middle.¹⁰

Zoom in ever further. What word is dead center in that phrase? "Covenant." That's the centerpiece. And that's the answer to my opening question. What's the ideal kind of relationship to have with God? A covenant relationship. Believe it or not, it's even sweeter and more profound than the father-child relationship with have with God. I'll explain why in a minute, but first let's look at this phrase, "blood of the covenant."

Exodus 24:6

That phrase comes from Exodus 24:8, where God first made his covenant with Israel through Moses right after the Exodus. The covenant was this—on God's side, he would promise to protect and bless the people and be their God. And the people's side, they agreed to love God and follow the Ten Commandments. That was the agreement, and to ratify the covenant, Moses sacrificed some animals.

Exodus 24:6 Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. 7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." 8 Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant."

The people had to keep the words in the Book of the Covenant, and the blood of the covenant sprinkled on them ratified the deal. That's what Jesus is alluding to, but instead of "*the* blood of the covenant," he says it's "*my* blood of the covenant." And instead of sprinkling it on them, he tells them to drink it. That's key—instead of the blood being on the outside, on their skin, it will be inside them.

Zechariah 9

So that's where the phrase originated, but there's one other place in the Old Testament where it appears. It's in Zechariah, and this time, instead of looking backward to the Exodus, it looks forward.

Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ... 10 He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. 11 As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

The wicked will be punished, Israel's King will bring peace to the nations, and freedom to the godly remnant—all because of the blood of the covenant. So that phrase points back to the Exodus and forward to the end. And it's connected to the Messiah, who will come riding on the donkey, which Jesus had done in the triumphal entry a week earlier.

Covenant of Love

Now, I told you the best kind of relationship you can have with God (or with people for that matter) is a covenant relationship. Here's why: it's because of the way it mixes law and love. If you fail to understand this concept (which many, many Christians do) you'll be hopelessly confused about the gospel. You'll read passages that focus on the law side—the legally binding stipulations, and you'll say, "Okay, a covenant is the same as a modern day contract."

¹⁰ If you divide the paragraph such that v.26 isn't included, then the center is, "this is my blood."

Exodus 19:5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.

If you keep your end, I'll keep my end—a strict, legal arrangement with clear rules. There are Christians that gravitate toward that. They love the clarity of it, and the certainty. You know exactly what's required of you, everything is laid out in black and white, you understand the terms and you always know exactly where you stand.

Other people are drawn more to an emotion based relationship. They focus on passages like:

Jeremiah 31:3 I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Love relationships are wonderful. They aren't always very predictable, but they're wonderful because the person comes near you because they want to. They enjoy it.

We all have both kinds of relationships. You have some relationships that are contractual—you do your part; they do their part. And you have relationships that are emotional. A friend that you hang around just because you feel like it.

If you see your relationship with God mainly in legal terms, chances are you struggle with a lot of self-condemnation. You're always down on yourself because you keep failing on your end of the deal. "I'm a terrible Christian" "I'm a lousy mom." I'm a terrible this, terrible that—you always feel inadequate. You often feel like other people are looking down on you. And you feel like God is mostly disappointed in you, but he puts up with you because he's contractually bound to do so by his promises. People like that often have their conscience screwed on a little too tight. No matter what they do, they always have a nagging, guilty conscience. They never feel like they're really doing very well or are very close with God.

If you see your relationship with God mainly in emotional terms, that has its own set of struggles. If you think of God loving you because he feels like it, and there's nothing you can do on your end that has any effect on his love, you might end up with your conscience screwed on a little too loose. Nothing you do has any effect on your relationship with God, so there isn't that much motivation to resist temptation. You think of God as a jolly old Santa Clause who's never really upset with you, and so you have very little fear of God.

And your relationship with God is completely unpredictable. If God just blesses you when he feels like it, and he's not blessing you right now, he must not feel like it—there's nothing you can do about that.

And a lot of times, people grew up on one side of that, realized the drawbacks, and now they've swung over to the other side.

Both sides have problems, and they seem to be two totally different ways of relating to God, and yet both have Bible verses that seem to support them. Why is that? It's because the ideal kind of relationship with God is a combination of those two sides. To use the language of Deuteronomy 7, it's a covenant of love.

Deuteronomy 7:12 If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your forefathers.

A covenant of love combines the best of both worlds. You have the clarity and structure and reliability of a contractual relationship, and you also have the warmth and intimacy of a love relationship. And both sides strengthen the other side. I love my friends, but my love for my wife is deeper because it's a covenant. If you're my friend, five years from now we might be close, or we might go our separate ways. If you invite a friend to dinner, maybe he'll come, but maybe he won't just because he doesn't want to. Or maybe he wants to, but he can't because of some commitment that's a higher priority.

But my wife can count on my full commitment. Unless one of us dies, I fully expect to be enjoying her love 5 years from now, 10 years. If I become crippled or disfigured or something happens that makes me less and less desirable to be around, she'll still be there. I had close friends at Agape who had a disagreement with me, and turned their backs, and it's likely I'll never see or hear from them again in this

life. I have a disagreement with Tracy and I know at some point we'll have to work it out because neither of us is going anywhere.

Why? Because we're not just friends. We have a legally binding contract of marriage. But that legal part isn't instead of the emotional part. It enhances the emotional part. Our love is deeper because of the fact that we know it's permanent. And any time the emotions fade, the commitment will keep us together until we can get the emotions back on track. The sense of security that comes from that legal commitment deepens the emotional love.

And in the other direction, the emotion strengthens the commitment. The stronger my feelings for her, the easier it is to keep my vows and carry out my responsibilities. That's what makes a covenant such an amazing kind of relationship. It not only combines the best of both worlds, but in combining them, makes each of them stronger and deeper.

It's such a mistake when people want to pit law against grace as if they are opposed to each other. Why do some verses focus on law, and other verses focus on grace? Because a relationship with God is a rich, deep, complex thing with many facets. People want to over-simplify it to make it easier to write about in a theology book or easier to understand and control. But it's not a simplistic, flat, two-dimensional arrangement. It's a lot more like a marriage than a simple friendship or a simple contractual arrangement.

God's Side

So back to the upper room. We've reached the climactic center of Mark's account.

24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

I showed you how that line is sandwiched in the center of this paragraph, but let's zoom out a little further. This whole paragraph is also in the center of a sandwich. And it's sandwiched between two really ugly slices of bread. Look at that previous paragraph (vv.17-21). That whole paragraph is about how one of the twelve will betray Jesus. Now look at the following paragraph (vv.27-31).

Mark 14:27 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them.

And the rest of the paragraph is the disciples arguing with Jesus—"No we won't" and Jesus assuring them, "I guarantee it—you will, this very night." Those are the two slices of bread—betrayal and refusal to believe what Jesus is saying. And what's in the middle? Jesus makes a covenant with them. This paragraph stands out as a sparking jewel in the middle of what is otherwise the blackest chapter in the whole Bible. Surrounding the account of the covenant promise, ratified by Jesus' death, is everything that makes Jesus' death necessary.

What if our relationship with God were a pure contractual arrangement? How long would this contract have lasted? Not even one paragraph. In the very next paragraph they already fail completely.

Apart from grace that rises above our unfaithfulness, this relationship can never happen. I said before that a covenant relationship with God goes even deeper than the father-child relationship. The father-child aspect of our relationship with God is emphasized more in the New Testament than any other aspect. There's nothing more precious than the fact that we can call him Father. But there is a foundation underneath that relationship that makes it possible, and it's the covenant relationship. No one is naturally God's child. It can only happen through adoption, and that can only happen through the covenant. Without God acting first, we're like the disciples—we'll never come within a million miles of being faithful to our end of the covenant.

Our Side

And because of that, I've heard multiple preachers say this is a unilateral covenant. It's one-sided. God is faithful to his side no matter what, and he will give us grace regardless of what we do or don't do. Is that accurate?

Let me ask you this—if that is accurate, how do you explain Judas? If God is going to just be faithful to lavish grace on us regardless of what we do, how is it that Judas ends up in hell? And before you hyper-Calvinize him into hell on the basis of nothing but arbitrary predestination, remember that Jesus said it was specifically because of his betrayal (v.21).

We are saved by grace alone, but if your idea of grace is that nothing is required of us, you have oversimplified the gospel to the point of destroying it. Of course something is required of us. Of course there's a difference between Peter and Judas. Both betrayed Jesus, but one is in heaven and the other is in hell—why? What is our responsibility in this covenant relationship?

What does the passage say? What does Jesus command the disciples to do? On Jesus' end, he will provide redemption. He will shed his blood as a ransom for many. What must the disciples do? What does he say? There's one command in the whole paragraph.

22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." 23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

Take it. That stands out to me when I read this passage because it seems like an odd thing to say. Usually if you serve someone some bread, you don't have to instruct them to take it. The fact that Jesus verbalizes that draws attention to the fact that that's our role. It's our only role. Take it.

And not just the symbol, but the reality. All indications are that Judas partook of the bread and cup.¹¹ He took the symbols, but not the reality.

So how do you receive the reality? We know the answer is through faith, but what specific shape does faith take in this passage? I see four aspects.

1 Ingestion

First, ingestion—taking what Jesus offers inside you. Remember how the blood of the old covenant was sprinkled on the people, but now Jesus takes the symbol of the blood of the new covenant and tells us to drink it. Eat the bread. Swallow it. Let it become part of you.

When you read about the new covenant in Jeremiah 31, what is the most fundamental difference between the old covenant and the new?

Jeremiah 31:31 ... I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel ... 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers ... because they broke my covenant ... 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

If you think the old covenant is law and the new covenant is grace and no law, think again. If you say, "Well, there's still some law, but not as much as in the Old Testament," think again. I would suggest that if the main difference is that it used to be external and now it's internal—it's a part of you—that's more law, not less. That's a greater emphasis on law. Instead of just something you keep, it's something you are.

And that happens when Jesus Christ becomes our food and drink. We look to him to satisfy the cravings of our soul. When I long for pleasure or meaning in life or happiness or safety and security or hope or acceptance or any of the things the human heart craves, instead of running to some earthly thing to satisfy that craving, I run to Christ. The more you do that, the more he will write his law on your heart. That's what it means to eat and drink Christ.

¹¹ Judas was there in the previous verse, and there's no indication that he left. If he did leave before Jesus tells all of them to partake, Mark doesn't seem to be concerned about letting us know that. If anything, the emphasis on all of them partaking would seem to point the other way.

2 Co-Suffering

Second—co-suffering. When we share in Jesus' cup, we share in his suffering.

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

Romans 8:17 ... we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

2 Corinthians 1:5 the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives.

Colossians 1:24 ... I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions.

1 Peter 4:13 rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ.

Every time you take communion, this is what you're signing up for.

3 Remembering

Third, remember. Mark doesn't say that, but he implies it with the Passover context. Just as the Passover celebration was to be a repeated reminder of salvation from Egypt, the new Passover, communion, is a repeated reminder of Jesus' redemption.

Sometimes in the debates about communion people will say, "It can't just be a mere remembrance." When they use those words, "mere remembrance," they show they don't appreciate the importance of remembering in Scripture. I heard a preacher say this week, "Do you know what the most frequent command in God's Word is? It's not 'Love God' or 'Love people' or 'Obey God.' It's, 'Remember.'" I didn't go through and count to verify that, but it's easy to believe when you think of how often God calls us to remember. So much of our failure spiritually—in fact, you could argue maybe all spiritual failures—are due to us failing to remember some truth about God in that moment.

So what is our responsibility in this covenant relationship? Remember what Jesus did. And there's a whole lot more to that than just, "He died for my sins." That's not the only reason Jesus died. If you look up the passages in Scripture that say, "Jesus died so that ..." you find a lot of passages. Here's a sampling.

- In addition to the fact that he died to pay the penalty for our sins, Jesus also died to become the new temple
- to give us access to the Father in prayer
- to show the power and wisdom of God in the gospel
- to make us eager to do good
- to defeat selfishness
- to enable us to receive God's love
- to purify our consciences
- to guarantee God will give us all good things
- to free us from the bondage of sin
- to open our eyes
- to make us bold in prayer
- to give us confidence of His sympathy
- to give our lives meaning
- so we might die to sins
- to enable us to persevere
- to free us from the fear of death
- to break down the wall of hostility and create unity in the Church
- to become exalted and worshipped
- to please the Father

- to pay our debt
- to enable us to participate in his work

There's a lot to remember when you take communion, and it's in that act of remembering that we receive the grace that Jesus died to purchase for us that enables us to live out our side of the covenant.

4 Gratitude

What's our side of this covenant? Ingestion, co-suffering, remembering, and one more ... gratitude. It stands out how Jesus specifically gives thanks for the bread and then again for the cup. He did the same thing both times he fed the multitudes. The texts specifically mentions how he gave thanks first. Jesus never handles bread in the Bible without giving thanks. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus walked and talked for hours with those guys and they didn't recognize him. But when he gave thanks for the food, that's when they realized it was Jesus. His body might have looked different, but there was no mistaking his gratitude.

Gratitude is mentioned in every passages that speaks of the Lord's table. It's a crucial part. I could do a series of sermons on the role gratitude plays in every aspect of living the Christian life, but we don't have time for that now. All I'll say is don't underestimate the importance of it. Nothing in the Christian life will work without it. With it, everything works.

Conclusion: If Only We Could Do What Mary Did

We didn't get to the part about Jesus not drinking the fruit of the vine again until the kingdom of God, which is probably a good thing because I'm not sure I fully understand that at this point, so it will be good to have another month to work on it. For now, let me close with this. Think back again to the anointing by Mary at the beginning of the chapter. Remember when Jesus told them, "The poor you will always have but you will not always have me"? That is a poignant statement, isn't it? At some point it must have hit them that they missed not just a once in a lifetime opportunity, but a once in the history of the world opportunity. They were there with Jesus the night before he died. They could have followed this Mary's example and done something to honor Jesus' death. They missed it, and that opportunity is now gone forever.

Are you a little bit envious of Mary? Because of the way Mary honored Jesus' death, he said she would be honored throughout history wherever the gospel is preached all over the world. I wish I could do something worthy of honor like that. I can't honor Jesus' death exactly the way she did—that opportunity is gone. But if only I could do *something*—something similar to what she did. Something to honor Jesus' death that would be especially pleasing to him.

That's how you feel at the end of v.9, then you read a couple paragraphs, and, oh look—communion! A divinely prescribed way of doing the very thing that brought eternal honor to Mary wherever the gospel is preached. We can do the same thing she did right now.

Harmony

Matthew 26:

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take **and eat**; this is my body." 27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, **all of you**. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many **for the forgiveness of sins**. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in **my Father's**

Mark 14:

22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." 23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. 25 "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom

Luke 22:15 **And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."** 17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and **divide it** among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 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.**" 20 In the same way, after the supper

1 Corinthians

11:23 ... The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, **which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.**" 25 In the same way, **after supper** he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the **new covenant** in my blood; **do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.**" 26 For **whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup,**

Summary

Jesus reinterpreted the Passover bread of affliction to point to his (sacrificed) body, the bread of life. Drinking from Jesus' cup means participating in his suffering. The blood being poured out shows it will be a sacrifice to bring about redemption described in Isaiah 53. The cup represents his blood, which ratified the covenant.

It is only through a covenant relationship with God that we can receive his favor. A covenant is a beautiful combination of law and love. Relationships based only on emotion are unreliable. So are relationships based only on law. The covenant of love combines the best of both.

By sandwiching this event between instances of the disciples' unfaithfulness, Mark highlights the need for Jesus' death. If it were a mere contract, we would have no hope.

But it does not imply a unilateral covenant. Something is required on our end (Judas is proof of that). Our side is to "take it" and "drink." This involves remembering, gratitude, participation in Jesus' suffering (You will drink the cup I drink), and well as taking Christ in as our sustenance