



Speaker:
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The Superiority of the New Covenant

Series: The Gospel of Mark · 49 of 49

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And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, "Take, eat. This is my body." And he took the cup and, when he had given thanks, he gave it to them. And they all drank of it. And he said unto them, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

If you remember last week's message, you'll know we're just a few hours away in our account from the arrest, trial and death of the saviour.

The announcement has been made: Jesus is to be betrayed by one of his own friends. But this Passover meal isn't over yet. And although the meal was supposed to follow a traditional format, we see today Jesus introducing a new element.

The Passover celebration itself would fade into obscurity. Even now, in this meal, the Passover as a memorial was being overshadowed, just as the expectations of Jewish nationalism were. The Messiah's role was ultimately to **die** as a once-for-all sacrifice for sinful people. Passover was, ultimately, about Jesus Christ.

Our focus today is on the institution of this small ritual. After Jesus ascended to heaven, believers were to share bread and wine together as a prompt for them to remember the death of their saviour on Calvary's hill.

I'll quickly mention the different terms we use to describe this act of remembrance. At new Road, we call it "the Breaking of Bread". It's also known as "the Lord's Table", or "Holy Communion". The early church preferred the term *Eucharist*, which comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving.

More particularly, we'll be talking today about the new covenant, or contract, which this ritual signifies. We'll look at the covenant, or covenants, which were in place in Jesus's day. We'll then look at the *better* covenant that took its place. And finally, we'll consider the signs of this new covenant.

The Replacement of the Old Covenant

Let's talk a bit about covenants. These are agreements God draws up. They explain the terms and conditions by which he has a relationship with man.

The Lord created several of these, but we'll look at the two most significant ones in place at the time of Jesus's earthly ministry.

Firstly, there was the covenant God made with Abraham. We've heard a bit about this in our weekly readings from the book of Genesis. You might remember some of the details. God said he would give Abraham many descendants, land, and there was even the hint of a coming saviour. In turn, they were to have faith in God.

You shouldn't think this covenant was replaced by the one God made with Moses. When the Mosaic covenant came along, **it ran in parallel with the Abrahamic one**. The Scriptures are very clear that the first one remained in effect:

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ; the Law—which was four hundred and thirty years after—cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance be of the Law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Galatians 3:17–18

The grammar's awkward, but it's saying the Law of Moses didn't replace the existing one. More than this; the covenant God made with Abraham was superior to the one he made with Moses.

By the way, although we're talking today about a new and superior covenant to supplant the others, there's still a spiritual connection between us and Abraham:

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

Galatians 3:6–7

The people in the Middle East are not the children of God **unless** they belong to Jesus. There are Palestinian Christians who've been evicted from their homes by Jews, and this wickedness is excused by large numbers in the church of God.

Now: where there was a real spiritual relationship at the heart of the Abrahamic covenant, this seal had a *sign* to represent it:

This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: every man child among you shall be circumcised.

Genesis 17:10

Although the sign was applied only to male children, as heads of families they'd be the means by which God blessed both the men and the women.

Then we read about the introduction of **another** covenant. It was presented by God to the people through a mediator, Moses, and it was created because of men's sin:

Wherefore then serveth the Law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made...

Galatians 3:19

You see also it had an expiry date, just like the Abrahamic agreement. It was to exist **until the promised seed came**, and this “seed” was none other than Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here’s how those people “signed” the covenant:

And he took the book of the covenant and read in the audience of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD hath said will we do and be obedient.” And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.”

Exodus 24:7–8

Honestly, as clearly as everything was explained to them, they didn’t understand what they were letting themselves in for by saying *We’ll do everything God says*.

Just as the Abrahamic covenant had a sign—circumcision—so the Mosaic covenant had *its* sign, and this was sabbath keeping:

Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them.

Ezekiel 20:12

However, we all know that it didn’t end well. The people’s sin continually frustrated the carrying out of God’s commands. Instead of being a standard the people met, the Law exposed their sinfulness even more. And so it was this old covenant was ruined:

For if that first covenant [the Mosaic Law] had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

Hebrews 8:7

Just to be clear: the legal structure God gave them wasn’t itself faulty. God’s Law was good. And even though it has nothing to do with us today, we should view it as having been good while it was in effect.

The relationship between the modern-day believer and the Law of Moses is not especially easy to describe. The difficulty’s given rise to many explanations. Better men than me have proposed sophisticated cases to show that the believer has some kind of relationship to the Mosaic Law. I can’t question their intelligence. I *can* question their conclusions. Sometimes, the answer is right in front of us.

The Mosaic Law has been divided up into three main areas. You have laws about ceremonies, laws to ensure a fair society, and laws about moral issues. I’ve no wish to support or reject this threefold division. I mention it because some will tell you the Ten Commandments represent God’s moral law and, because God’s moral standards don’t change, they tell us we’re governed in a sense by these Ten Commandments.

I want to make my case like this. The Ten Commandments were the embodiment of the whole Law of Moses. For example, the numerous laws about theft would all come under the general commandment to not steal. Crucially, we need to understand that the stone tablets in which the commandments of God were written are described in the Scriptures as *being* the covenant:

And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

1 Kings 8:21

It's important I make this point, because **when we talk about the replacement of the old covenant with a better one, we mean the replacement of the whole of the Mosaic Law including the Ten Commandments.** If we want to make those tables of stone our rule of life today, we cannot be said to be living according to the new covenant.

The Introduction of a Better Covenant

In this important passage we read today, Jesus is signifying the end of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. The emergence of a bright new covenant to exceed them all was prophesied hundreds of years previously:

“Behold, the days come”, saith the LORD, “that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them”, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 31:31–32

In what ways is this new covenant superior?

The mediator of it is Jesus Christ himself.

And for this cause, he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Hebrews 9:15

His commandments are easy to understand.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.

John 15:10–12

His Royal Law is now written on our hearts.

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days”, saith the Lord: “I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.”

Hebrews 10:16

The Spirit, and not the letter, is now employed.

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

2 Corinthians 3:6

The promises of God in this new covenant excel all others.

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

Hebrews 8:6

If you don't yet belong to Jesus Christ, here's one of the promises of the gospel which might interest you. There's a promise that **all who go to God in repentance, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, will be saved.**

If you've shed secret tears because you're not right with God, go to him now, as he's the one who'll wipe away all tears from your eyes. If you've felt discomfort or anxiety within you, knowing you have a lifetime of unforgiveness sin, go to God now, as he's the one who'll rid you of your pain. God has made promises, and should you take him up on them he **will** perform them.

The Signs of the New Covenant

We've already seen how each of those former covenants had seals and signs to indicate them.

When we take the example of the Abrahamic covenant, we see how admission into God's church was by circumcision. But under this new covenant, admission into the church is through baptism:

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power; in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:10–12

And this baptism is an **outward declaration** of the **inward seal** which is the presence of the Holy Spirit himself:

Now he which establishes us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, who hath also sealed us and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

2 Corinthians 1:21–22

But today we're focusing on the ritual we know as the Breaking of Bread or Holy Communion. And I want to address first the nature of these elements of bread and wine.

Following the days of the apostles, the church formed different interpretations of what Jesus said here. Some believed Jesus's words were meant to be taken literally, meaning the

bread and wine were converted to the literal body and blood of Jesus. Others understood what he said *symbolically*. And there was a variety of other views between those two.

Today, the belief in a literal transformation of those elements into the body and blood of Jesus is associated most with the church of Rome. They'd say they're simply taking what Jesus said at face value. But as their doctrine has developed, it's become more and more bizarre.

There's a common-sense reason to believe Jesus was speaking figuratively. He was standing there at the time. Rome would say he was standing there *and* he was also in the elements. Remember this was all done in the context of a Passover meal which was rich in symbolism. Does it not make more sense to assume that what Jesus included was also symbolic?

Another reason to doubt Rome's view is to do with Jewish Law. The Mosaic Law banned any consumption of blood, which is why all the blood would be drained from slaughtered animals before they were taken to be eaten. If these disciples were appalled at the idea of consuming blood, how much more appalled would they be at the thought of consuming human blood—not just any human blood either, but the blood of their master!

Consider too the breaking of this bread by Jesus represented the breaking of his body at his crucifixion. If we see the bread as his literal body, his body would have been broken *before* Calvary.

I'll mention just one more thing. Mark's gospel's in Greek, but that's not the language of Jesus. He spoke in Aramaic. And in that language, Jesus doesn't even say "this is my body". In Aramaic, it simply "This...my body". We're not to gloat that we have greater light than others, but I'd have thought Rome would have realised long ago just how ridiculous their doctrine of transubstantiation is.

No friends, the business of the Lord's table is to be a SIGN for those who have received the **seal** of Christ. We enact the dual sign of consuming the body and blood of Jesus in a *spiritual* manner.

The memorial under the old covenant was sabbath keeping:

Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, "Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you."

Exodus 31:13

The sign of sabbath keeping is no more. For us, it's no longer *Remember the Sabbath Day*, but *Remember Calvary*.

This flat, unleavened bread Jesus shared with his disciples represented deliverance from bondage. And when the Hebrews remembered their hasty exit from Egypt, some would understand that this remembrance was also sustaining the hope of a future saviour.

In referring to the wine as the blood of the covenant, there's no doubt the disciples would have been caused to remember how the old covenant was ratified. As we read earlier, back

then blood was sprinkled on the people. The important difference here is this is not about the external application of animal blood which had no power to take away sin. This new covenant wine is consumed. It goes inside us. And it represents the shed blood of Jesus which DOES have power to cancel sin. And it's in this way we understand verses like this:

Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:54

If this bread and wine we share was literally the body and blood of Jesus, and consuming it gave eternal life, our evangelism would be very different. We'd take gallons of wine and tons of bread into the city centres and persuade as many people as possible to eat and drink!

But we understood this in the way it was meant: spiritually. We feed and drink of Jesus by *faith*. It's this true faith by which God saves, and only those who **are** saved HAVE this true faith.

If you read the 24th chapter of Exodus, you see an Old Testament precedent for eating and drinking at the "Lord's table". Moses and a number of others went up the mountain, met with God, and had a meal. As special as that would have been, what we do is far superior. When we break bread together, we acknowledge Christ's new covenant.

You'll note in verse 25 Jesus makes one of his "verily" statements. We're meant to take notice. He announces eating and drinking with them is to stop. Now this was a social as well as religious exercise. The announcement is ominous. His socialising in this world was at an end. He was going to meet his doom.

But he doesn't leave them without hope. He **will** eat and drink with them again soon. Remember that the coming of his kingdom *had* been taking place, *was* taking place, and *would take place in the future*. The coming of the kingdom described the unveiling of the new era in the history of God's transactions with the human race.

The most likely fulfilment seems to be the time after Jesus's resurrection when he ate—and presumably drank—with his disciples. But the immediate encouragement this brought was the promise of his resurrection. If he were going to eat and drink with them again, it must be because he would rise from the dead as he said! And it was in this resurrection the kingdom of God would be established in a way it hadn't before.

Brothers and sisters: Jesus Christ ushered in a new covenant for you to live by. You are in the pleasant servitude of Jesus. You have the knowledge of a certain and everlasting forgiveness. You're part of a covenant that cannot be broken. You now have the Spirit in a very special way. And you should daily enquire into how you can be more influenced *by* the Holy Spirit:

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the Law.

Galatians 5:18

The closer to God you are, the more you'll understand you're not under the Law. The Ten Commandments represented the old covenant, and this covenant has been voided. Certainly, there are principles in the Mosaic Law which still represents God's standards. But that should be irrelevant to you. You are led by the Spirit, not ruled by the Law. **YOU ARE FREE, BRETHREN!** Free to serve Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

God be praised for this new...and magnificent...and generous...and *superior* covenant of Jesus Christ.

Amen.