

The Bread and Wine **Mark 14:12-26**

We've got a lot of variety in preaching during the next 5 weeks because of vacation plans. I'll preach a couple of times, Kent and Randy will preach and MNTC will be here next week. Then we'll start a new sermon series on July 15. So for my two sermons during this time I am going to preach one about believer's baptism to prepare for our baptismal service coming up on August 5, and I decided to do the other one on Communion, which will be today.

Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is very familiar to us. We take it once a month, we pass the bread and the little cups of grape juice and we know that the bread stands for Jesus' body and the grape juice stands for Jesus' blood. It's a tradition for us and we are going to be doing it again this morning. But one of the things we probably don't realize is that our practice of Communion has a very Gentile flavor to it. We use homemade bread made with yeast and we use grape juice; we read a few verses, pass the trays, eat the elements, and we're good to go until the next month. This is a modern, Evangelical, Gentile way of taking Communion and it does what it's supposed to do. It reminds us of Jesus' broken body and his blood that was poured out for us when he died on the cross.

But this morning I want us to experience Communion from a different perspective – from a Jewish perspective. I want us to experience it more like the 12 disciples did the very first time Communion was served. We're still going to have bread with yeast in it, and we're still going to have grape juice in the little cups, but I'm going to take us back 2,000 years to the Upper Room in Jerusalem where this tradition began. My hope is that by understanding the original story behind it, we will come to appreciate it more than ever.

Most of the information I will be sharing with you today, besides the biblical text itself, comes from two books: Israel's Holy Days In Type and Prophecy by Daniel Fuchs and The NIV Harmony of the Gospels by Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry.

In America, we have several major holidays throughout the year that have a huge influence on our calendar and our culture. For each of these holidays, we understand at least in part, some of the history behind them, some of the traditions, and what those traditions mean. By far, the most influential and best known holiday in our culture is Christmas. Almost everyone celebrates Christmas, especially in our area. It dominates retail sales beginning months in advance. It

dominates planning for organizations and families as everybody tries to schedule special Christmas events. It dominates communication and media with all the music, movies and t.v. shows. It's all that people talk about for weeks and when it finally gets here it dominates our calendars and plans. People travel hundreds of miles to gather for Christmas celebrations with family and friends. It's a big deal.

In ancient Israel, they had similar celebrations throughout their calendar year. They had 7 major feasts and just like us they understood the history behind them, the traditions, and what those traditions meant. And for them, the biggest and most influential feast by far was the Passover. In fact, the Passover was basically two major feasts rolled into one. It included the Passover, which was observed on the 15th day of the first month of their calendar year – a month known as Nisan. It also included the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which began the day before the Passover, and continued for 7 more days until the 21st of Nisan. Like Christmas, these combined feasts dominated commerce, planning, communication, and travel – they were a huge deal. But unlike Christmas, they were only celebrated in one city – ancient Jerusalem – the capital of Israel. So every year, hundreds of thousands of Jews would converge on the city of Jerusalem for the highly energetic, colorful, joyous, and festive occasion.

The Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread commemorated the very first Passover, which took place in Egypt in about 1500B.C. Pharaoh had enslaved the Jewish people for 400 years and God delivered them through a series of ten terrible plagues. The final plague was the death of the firstborn, where at sundown, God put the firstborn in every Egyptian home to death. But for the Jews, God made a provision for their protection. They were to take a lamb from their flocks without blemish, less than one year old, and on the evening of the final plague, they were to kill the lamb and sprinkle its blood on the doorposts and lintel of their homes. When the Lord came to the homes with the blood sprinkled on them he would not send the destroyer in, but he would pass over that home. Thus it became known as the “Lord’s Passover.” On that night, each Israelite family was to stay in their home. They were to roast and eat the Passover lamb along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs and prepare for an immediate departure the next day. At that time the Lord commanded them that when they came into the Promised Land, they were to observe the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread at the appointed time every year.

So that's what was going on in Jerusalem during the week Jesus was crucified. Hundreds of thousands of excited Jewish visitors were there to worship and celebrate the Passover. Friday of that week was the Passover and Thursday was the

day of preparation and beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. According to Jewish practices, each new day began at sundown. So the Passover actually began on what we would know as Thursday evening. It was on that night that Jesus went to the Upper Room to eat the Passover meal with his disciples – a meal we know as the Last Supper.

Read Mark 14:12-16.

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread (Thursday), when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, “Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?”¹³ And he sent two of his disciples (Peter and John) and said to them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him,¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’¹⁵ And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us.”¹⁶ And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

The preparation for the Passover involved many things. Each family or group that was celebrating together would first select a Passover lamb from their flocks. They did this on the 10th of Nisan – five days before the Passover. The lamb was separated from the rest of the flock, then on the 14th of Nisan, they would take the lamb to sacrifice it at the Temple. It was on that day that Jesus sent Peter and John into the city to make preparations.

On that day there were tens of thousands of people at the Temple, each with their own lamb, and they were separated into three divisions. Each division was let into the courtyard where the priests were lined up. The people took their lamb to the priest, they would cut its throat and the priest would catch its blood in a bowl, which they would then throw against the base of the altar. Then they would skin the lamb and carefully wrap it in its own skin. While this was happening, a Levitical choir would be singing the “Hallel,” which was a responsive hymn of praise from Psalms 113-118. Once all the lambs were slain, everyone in that division was sent on their way, carrying the lambs to their homes to be roasted on a spit.

Besides the lambs there were four other parts of the meal that had to be prepared. There was the unleavened bread – bread that had to be baked without using any leaven (or yeast), and bitter herbs. These were prescribed in the book of Exodus, but other things were added to the meal as well. There was the charoseth, which was a pasty mixture of vinegar, figs, almonds, dates, and spices. And there was the

meat of the chagigah, which was a special voluntary peace offering. So as Peter and John went to the Upper Room to make preparations for the Passover, these are the things they prepared. Later that evening, Jesus and the 10 remaining disciples joined them.

Read Luke 22:14-16.

And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

In each home, the head of the household would lead the family through the meal and in that particular gathering, Jesus was the head. This meant that he was the one who would do the teaching and lead in the prayers and hymns that were associated with the different parts of the feast. Every part of the meal was planned and had symbolic, memorial, and prophetic elements that the head of household would explain.

On that night, Jesus began by telling the disciples that he was eager to eat the Passover with them and that he wouldn't eat it again until it was fulfilled in the kingdom of God. So he indicated that the Passover wasn't just about looking backward, but it was also looking forward. At that time, the disciples didn't understand what the fulfillment of the Passover meant, only Jesus. The fulfillment meant that he would become the sacrificial Lamb of God and his blood would be poured out for the forgiveness of sins. He did that the next day, but he wouldn't eat the Passover with them until after his return because 40 days later he ascended into heaven. So the next time he will eat the Passover will be when he returns and gathers his people to eat what Revelation 19 calls the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Jesus would have then poured the first of 4 cups of wine for his disciples – two cups were drunk before the meal, and two cups after. Each cup symbolically corresponded with one of four promises of God to Israel in Exodus 6:6-7: *"Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and (1) I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and (2) I will deliver you from slavery to them, and (3) I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷⁽⁴⁾ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."* With the first cup of wine poured, he would have then given thanks with a traditional prayer and they would have drunk the first cup.

What followed was a ceremonial washing of hands. As they washed their hands, Jesus would have prayed a customary prayer: *“Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, who has sanctified us with Thy commandments and has enjoined us concerning the washing of our hands.”* This ceremonial washing symbolized that the worshipper had been sanctified by God. This practice was probably what Paul had in mind when he wrote what he did in 1 Cor. 11:28 – that when we gather together to partake in the Lord’s Supper, we are to examine ourselves before eating the bread and drinking the cup. It was after the washing of hands that Jesus took it a step further and proceeded to get down like a servant and wash the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-20). This deviation from the norm symbolized that he would in fact wash them clean from their sins through his death on the cross.

After this, the food was brought in. Jesus would have reminded them of what each of the elements of the meal meant. The Passover lamb reminded them that God passed over the blood-sprinkled homes of their fathers in Egypt. The unleavened bread reminded them of their fathers’ sudden deliverance out of Egypt after the final plague – they made unleavened bread because there was no time for the yeast to rise. The bitter herbs reminded them that the Egyptians made the lives of their fathers bitter. The pasty charoseth reminded them of the toil of their fathers as they made clay bricks. And the chagigah reminded them that in the midst of all the death of the Egyptians around them their fathers were at peace with God.

Before eating, a second cup of wine would have been poured and drunk after which the explanation of the feast from Exodus 12:26-27 would have been given: *“And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’²⁷ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.”* They then would have sung the first part of the Hallel – the same hymn of praise that was sung at the Temple earlier that day and Jesus would have prayed a prayer of blessing.

It was after the first two cups of wine that the meal was eaten. While they were eating a couple of significant things happened. The first is that Jesus spoke to them of one from that very table that would betray him. Mark 14:18-20 says: *“And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.’¹⁹ They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I?’²⁰ He said to them, ‘It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.’* He was referring to dipping the unleavened bread into the charoseth. John recorded that as soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him and he left. (John 13:27).

The other significant thing that happened while they at the meal had to do with what Jesus said when he passed around the unleavened bread. Mark 14:22 says this: *“And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.”* Passing around the bread would have been normal for the Passover meal. What wasn’t normal was that this time Jesus told them *“This is my body.”* In essence, what Jesus was telling them was that he was what the unleavened bread ultimately pointed to. The unleavened bread reminded them of God’s sudden deliverance of their fathers from slavery in Egypt, but it also had a prophetic element – looking forward to the Messiah who would deliver his people from slavery to sin. By saying “this is my body” Jesus was telling them that he was the fulfillment of that. The very next day Jesus’ body would be broken for them when he died on the cross to deliver them from their sins.

After the meal was eaten, Jesus poured the third cup of wine. This cup traditionally related to the third promise of God to Israel in Exodus 6:6-7: *“I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.”* It was known as the cup of redemption – a normal part of the Passover meal. But on that night, Jesus said something new about that cup.

Read Mark 14:23-26.

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Again, just like with the unleavened bread, Jesus was telling them that he was the fulfillment of what that cup symbolized. That cup not only reminded them of the blood of the lambs that redeemed their fathers from death in Egypt, but it also pointed to the blood of the Messiah that would redeem his people from condemnation. By saying “this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” Jesus was telling them that he was the ultimate fulfillment of that promise. And of course, the very next day, Jesus blood’ was poured out for their redemption as he hung on the cross.

He finished by telling them that he wouldn’t drink of the cup again until the day when he would drink it new in the kingdom of God – similar to what he said at the very beginning of the meal, but with added significance here because they were

supposed to drink one more cup of wine that night with their Passover Meal – the cup relating to the fourth promise in Exodus 6:6-7 – “*I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.*” Jesus was saving that cup for when he returned to fulfill that promise and would drink it with them at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

The last thing they did was to sing a hymn which would have been the second half of the Hallel – the praise hymn they sang earlier – and then they headed out to the Garden of Gethsemane.

On that night, at that Passover meal, when Jesus gave them the bread to eat and the wine to drink, saying, “This is my body... This is my blood...” he was telling them that he was the fulfillment of the Passover. He was the true Passover Lamb through whose broken body they would be delivered and through whose blood they would be redeemed. And it was just a few hours later on the day of Passover that he was arrested, beaten and crucified. His body was broken and his blood was poured out for them. He became their deliver and redeemer and he is the same for us today.

In just a minute we are going to sing a couple of songs to give us time to reflect and after that we will share in Communion. I hope that when you’re holding the bread and cup, they will have a lot more significance than before – that you will picture yourself sitting with Jesus and enjoying fellowship with him as you reflect on the significance of what these things mean and worship Jesus for being the Lamb of God who takes away our sins.