

WHAT SHOULD THE LORD'S SUPPER MEAN TO YOU?

14¹²On the first day of [the Feast of] Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover [lamb], [Jesus'] disciples asked him, Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover [meal]?¹³So he sent two of his disciples, instructing them, Go into the city, and a man carrying a pitcher of water shall meet you; follow him.¹⁴Whatever house that man enters, say to the owner, The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?¹⁵He will personally show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.¹⁶The disciples left, and came into the city, and found things just as [Jesus] had told them. So they made preparations for the Passover [meal].

¹⁷When evening came, [Jesus] arrived with the Twelve.¹⁸As they were reclining at the table eating, Jesus said, I tell you the truth, One of you shall betray me—one who is eating with me.¹⁹They became distressed, and one by one they asked him, Is it I?²⁰He replied, It is one of the Twelve, one who dips [bread] into the bowl with me.²¹The Son of man will go just as it is written about him. But woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.

²²As they were eating, he took [some] bread. After he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to them, saying, Take [this]; this is my body.²³Then he took a cup, and after he had given thanks, he gave to it them; and they all drank from it.²⁴He said to them, This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.²⁵I tell you the truth, I shall no longer drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it fresh in the kingdom of God.²⁶After they had sung a hymn, they went out to the mount of Olives. (Mk. 14:12-26)

Introduction

Have you ever said to yourself, “If only I had lived in the days of Jesus—if only I could have seen Him and heard Him and touched Him—it would have been so much easier. It would have been so much easier to appreciate what He did for me, so much easier to show my faith in Him, and so much easier to be assured of my relationship with Him. I could have actually followed Him, I could have actually embraced Him! “It all would have been so much more “personal;” so much more physical and tangible.”

Our faith and our spiritual life is feeble. We live in a “material world;” consequently, we stand in need of some kind of physical support and encouragement; some tangible means of assurance. We need something tangible that can illustrate the great things Christ has done for us; we need something tangible that can assure us of our relationship to Christ. To meet this need, to condescend to our human limitations, the Lord has graciously provided us with the sacraments, one of which is the Lord's Supper.

A sacrament can be defined as a sign and a seal of a spiritual reality. As a sign, the Lord uses the sacrament to visibly show us by physical symbols His redemptive

work and our relationship to Him. As a seal, the Lord uses the sacrament to assure us as Christians of our relationship to Him and the benefits we receive from that relationship; namely, forgiveness of sins and spiritual life.

As we study this next passage of the Gospel of Mark, let us consider the meaning of the Lord's Supper and its significance for us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. What is the Background of the Lord's Supper?

The Lord Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as He was sharing the Passover meal with His disciples. In addition to the passage of Mark 14:12, we should also consider Luke 22:14-20,

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵And he said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, ¹⁶for I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. ¹⁷After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among you, ¹⁸for I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. ¹⁹And 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. ²⁰In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. (Lk. 22:14-20)

With the annual Passover meal as the setting, the gospel writers only highlight the new and unique features of that last supper; the features Jesus introduced at that time, the features that would become the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

On the evening of the Passover, Jesus and His disciples returned to Jerusalem, because the Passover meal had to be eaten after sunset and in the royal city of Jerusalem. When each member of the "family" had taken his place, the head of the household began the celebration by taking the first (of four) cups of wine and offering the prayer of thanksgiving. Included in the thanksgiving was the prayer for the fulfillment of this sacramental feast in the kingdom of heaven, and the prayer to be preserved so as to participate in it yet another year. Following this prayer, the head of the household arose from the table and washed his hands; apparently, it was at this point in the evening that Jesus arose and washed His disciples' feet, as recorded in John 13.

After this ceremonial washing of the hands, the dishes were immediately brought to the table. The first dish consisted of bitter herbs, reminding the Jews of the bitterness of slavery experienced by their forefathers in Egypt. The next dish was stewed fruit; the color and paste-like texture would remind them of the clay used by their forefathers to make bricks in Egypt during the time of their slavery. The third dish was unleavened bread—it was known as "the bread of haste," for there was no time to wait for the leaven, or yeast, to rise that night of the first Passover, which was the night of the Exodus from Egypt. The fourth and final part for of

sacramental meal was the roasted Passover lamb. It represented the lamb that was slain on the night of the Exodus so that the angel of death would “pass over” and spare the homes of those who had sprinkled the blood of the lamb upon their doorposts.

The head of the house would now dip some of the bitter herbs into salt water or vinegar, pronounce a blessing, and partake of it, then it would be distributed to all those present at the table. Next he would break one of the three unleavened loaves (or wafers) lying on the table: half of it was put aside to be eaten after supper, (this portion was called “the after dish”); the other half was placed in a dish and lifted up as the head of the house proclaimed, “This is the bread of misery that our fathers ate in Egypt ... partake of the Passover.” The second cup of wine was now prepared.

At this point the youngest person present was instructed to ask about the meaning of this observance: “Why is this night ... different from all other nights?” The head of the house would then lead the family in a liturgy recounting the events of the LORD’s deliverance of His people from Egypt. Following this, the second cup of wine was lifted up, prayers were offered, Psalms 113-114 were recited, and then all those gathered around the table would drink of the wine.

Now everyone at the table would wash their hands and the actual meal began. A piece of the roasted Passover lamb, together with a piece of unleavened bread and bitter herbs, was distributed to each one present. Apparently, it was at this time that Jesus took a piece of bread, broke it, and spoke the words: *“Take this, this is my body”* (Mk. 14:22.)

When the meal was concluded, the head of the household blessed the third cup of wine with a prayer of thanksgiving. At this point, after the disciples had drunk of the wine, Jesus spoke the words, *“this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many”* (Mk. 14:24.) A fuller account of Jesus’ words is given in Matthew’s gospel: *“Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”* (Matt. 26:27-28.)

After the meal was finished, there was the singing of Psalms 115-118, and then the Passover was concluded with the drinking of the fourth cup of wine.

II. What is the Lord’s Supper Intended to Teach Us?

When Jesus distributed the bread (at the time when the Passover lamb was being eaten), He spoke the words, *“Take this, this is my body.”* Our Lord was declaring that His body, about to be offered unto God as a sacrifice upon the cross, was the ultimate sacrifice for sin. The Passover, and all the Old Testament sacrifices, served as a provisional sacrifice, anticipating the perfect sacrifice of the Son of God Himself. The Book of Hebrews declares: *“Day after day every*

priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when this priest [the Lord Jesus Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:11-12.) Note: Christ’s sitting at the right hand of God indicates that His work of atonement is finished and that it is accepted by God His Father.

When Jesus distributed the cup of wine, He spoke the words, *“Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸This is my blood of the covenant”* (Matt. 26:27-28.) In 1 Corinthians 11:25, referring to the Lord’s words spoken on the occasion of the first Lord’s Supper, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes, *“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.”* Jesus’ shed blood fulfilled the demands and requirements of the covenant established at Mt. Sinai, a covenant that typified God’s demand for whole-hearted devotion in the lives of those who would be His people:

When Moses went and told the people all Jehovah’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything Jehovah has said we will do.” ⁴Moses then wrote down everything Jehovah had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to Jehovah. ⁶Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything Jehovah has said; we will obey.” ⁸Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that Jehovah has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Ex. 24:3-8)

Consider the covenant the LORD established with His people at Mt. Sinai: First, Moses reported to the people the stipulations of the covenant (vs. 3a,) and the people responded by indicating their willingness to accept the terms of the covenant: *“We will do everything that Jehovah has spoken”* (vs. 3b.) Moses then proceeded to write *“all the words of the LORD;”* that is to say, he produced a written document of the covenant (vs. 4a.) Second, early the next morning Moses built an altar at the base of the mountain (i.e.; in God’s presence) and twelve pillars, representing the twelve tribes of Israel (vs. 4b.) He then instructed the young men, who had been previously chosen, to now offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings to the LORD (vs. 5.) (Note: The burnt offering symbolized complete devotion and dedication to the LORD on the part of the worshiper.) Moses then took the blood of these sacrificed animals and sprinkled half of it on the altar (vs. 6.) Third, the people reaffirmed their acceptance of the covenant (vs. 7.) Fourth, Moses then took the rest of the blood and sprinkled it upon the people, declaring, *“[This is] the blood of the covenant that Jehovah has made with you in accordance with all these words”* (vs. 7-8.)

At this point we must pause in order to rightly appreciate the meaning of the blood sprinkled upon the altar and then upon the people. When we have grasped the meaning of the sprinkled blood we can then appreciate the fact that the covenant of Mt. Sinai was enacted upon the principle of grace. The Old Testament commentators Keil & Delitzsch provide the best explanation of the meaning of the sprinkled blood. We quote them as follows:

The only reason for dividing the sacrificial blood into two parts was the fact that the blood sprinkled upon the altar could not be taken off again and sprinkled upon the people. The two halves of the blood are to be regarded as one blood: first sprinkled upon the altar, then sprinkled upon the people. In the blood sprinkled upon the altar, the natural life of the people is portrayed as being given up [in whole-hearted devotion] to God. Then, by means of the blood being sprinkled upon the people, what is being portrayed is that same life being restored to the people as a life renewed by the grace of God [to be lived in whole-hearted devotion unto God] (Keil & Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, Vol. 2, p. 158.)

Now we are in a position to understand the significance of the order of events as they occurred at the foot of Mt. Sinai. First, the people consent to accept the LORD's terms of the covenant. But notice that they are not required to fulfill those terms in reliance upon their own strength. On the contrary, what immediately happens next is the sprinkling of the blood upon the altar. In light of Keil & Delitzsch's interpretation, this actually represents an act of faith whereby the people entrusted themselves to the LORD their God. In New Testament terms, it is the equivalent of being joined together by faith to Christ in His death, as described in Romans 6:3, "*Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*" When the people reaffirm their intention of accepting the covenant as presented by the LORD, the remainder of the blood is then sprinkled upon them. As previously noted, the sprinkling of the blood upon the people is symbolizing (and provisionally procuring) the life renewed by the grace of God being bestowed upon the people. Again, in New Testament terms, it is the believer's participation with Christ in His resurrection life, ("*We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life*" Rom. 6:4,) a life lived unto God, ("*The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.*" ¹¹*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus,*" Rom. 6:10-11.)

Although the covenant ratified at Mt. Sinai was in fact a covenant founded upon the principle of grace, the people accepted it as a covenant of works. By their re-affirmation, "*We will do all that Jehovah has spoken; we will be obedient,*" (vs. 7,) they were expressing their intention to comply with the requirements of the covenant by taking upon themselves the covenant obligations. Thus, contrary to the LORD's intention, they received the covenant as a covenant of works. (But by the sprinkling of the remainder of the blood upon the people [vs. 7-8,] bearing in

mind what that act represented, Moses once again re-iterates the gracious character of the Mt. Sinai covenant.)

Exodus 32 will record Israel's breaking of the covenant by the making of the golden calf and worshipping it as a substitute for the LORD Himself. On that occasion the people were spared only because of the intercession made by Moses on their behalf:

The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to Jehovah; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." ³¹So Moses went back to Jehovah and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. ³²But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." (Ex. 32:30-32)

The LORD spared the people—by Moses' act of intercession—and in the course of time promised to establish a new covenant with them:

"The time is coming," declares Jehovah, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt; because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares Jehovah. ³³"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares Jehovah. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know Jehovah,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares Jehovah, "for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jer. 31:31-34)

The New Covenant (Jer. 33) does not replace the Mt. Sinai covenant as something of an altogether different nature; rather, the New Covenant replaced the Mt. Sinai Covenant in the sense that the Sinai Covenant was provisional and the New Covenant contains the promised substance and fulfillment of the original covenant.

Thus it is that at the time He instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus distributed the cup of wine and spoke these words, *"This is [i.e.; this wine represents] my blood of the covenant, that is poured out for many"* (Mk. 14:24.) Jesus' shed blood was fulfilling the demands of the old covenant. He offered His blood (His life) unto God the Father as a sacrifice of complete obedience, (which was the requirement of the covenant,) and at the same time, He offered His blood unto God as a sacrifice of atonement, bearing the punishment the disobedient people deserved,

... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment was laid upon him for our peace, and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Jehovah has laid upon him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:5-6)

Jesus' shed blood was at the same time establishing the new covenant. As noted, referring to the night Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, the Apostle Paul writes, *"After supper [Jesus offered] the cup, saying, 'This cup [represents] the new covenant [ratified] by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me'"* (1 Cor. 11:25.) Bear in mind that the New Covenant (Jer. 33) does not replace the Mt. Sinai covenant as something of an altogether different nature; rather, the New Covenant replaced the Mt. Sinai Covenant in the sense that the Sinai Covenant was provisional and the New Covenant contains the promised substance and fulfillment of the original covenant.

By virtue of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians become united to Christ in His death and resurrection, thereby fulfilling the requirements of the covenant in Christ and our relationship to Him. What was provisionally enacted in the Mt. Sinai covenant—the offering up of the worshiper's life in whole-hearted obedience unto the LORD our God and the receiving back a new life consecrated unto Him—is actually accomplished in the New Covenant by virtue of our relationship with Jesus the Messiah: The people entrusted themselves to the LORD their God (as represented by the sprinkling of the blood upon the altar) is actually accomplished by our being joined together by faith to Christ in His death, as described in Romans 6:3, *"Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"* The people receiving back a life renewed by the grace of God (as represented by the remainder of the blood is then sprinkled upon them) is actually accomplished by our participation with Christ in His resurrection life, *"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"* (Rom. 6:4.) As the Apostle Paul indicates, this new life is a life lived unto God, *"The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 6:10-11.) The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is intended to portray for us and grant the believer assurance of his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the ramifications of that relationship.

After having distributed the bread and the cup, Jesus concluded with the words: *"I tell you the truth, I shall no longer drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it fresh in the kingdom of God"* (Mk. 14:25.) Whereas the Gospel of Mark provides a condensed version of Jesus' statement, the Gospel of Matthew presents a fuller version of His statement, *"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 kingdom"* (Matt. 26:29.) This is the last meal the Lord would eat with His disciples on earth, because He was now going to the cross to actually accomplish all that the sacrament He has just instituted symbolized. But notice, too, that in His statement Jesus was also foretelling His resurrection and reception into His Father's kingdom—He will eat again, death is not the end for Him. He will eat

again, in His Father's kingdom, and we as believers will eat with Him. Jesus is assuring us that we as believers will be preserved and at last be received into His Father's kingdom, because of our relationship with Him and His perfect sacrifice at Calvary.

Conclusion

What meaning should the sacrament of the Lord's Supper have for us as Christians? The Lord uses the sacrament as a sign: a means of visibly showing us and reminding us of our relationship with Him. The Lord uses the sacrament as a seal: a means of tangibly assuring us of our relationship with Him and the benefits we receive from that relationship; namely, the forgiveness of our sins and the entrance into the spiritual life of our Lord Himself.