The Blood Covenant

Mark 14:12-26

Key Verse: 14:24 “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them.”

This week all Americans celebrate Independence Day. The fourth of July is the day when America proclaimed freedom from British’s rule and declared itself as an independent country to the whole world. It is ironic to study the Passover today, which is the fourth of July to the Israelites, and we will have the Holy Communion as the Passover meal. Today’s passage contains three separate stories, but focuses on the Last Supper with the covenant of Jesus’ blood.

First, the Passover. (12-16) The word Passover comes from Exodus 12:13, which says, “*The blood will be a sign for you on the house where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt*.” God commanded Moses to put the blood of the lamb on the door frames of the house so that the angel of God might pass over the houses when he strikes Egypt. In order to commemorate this God’s deliverance, God commanded Moses and the Israelites to celebrate the Passover during the Festival of the Unleavened Bread. On the fourteenth day of the first month, *Aviv* (Nisan), all the Israelites had to eat the Passover lamb and unleavened bread. The unleavened bread indicates their hasty departure. Every year they had to celebrate the Passover as we do for Independence Day. Look at verses 12. “***On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “When do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?***”

How did Jesus answer them? Jesus sent two of his disciples, telling them, “***Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks; Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.***” (13-15) This story reminds us of Jesus sending them to bring a donkey tied in the city when he entered Jerusalem. (11:1-7) How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ instruction? Look at verse 16. “***The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover***.” They obeyed and went. Someone said that it was the custom of those days when people made reservations for a room for the feast in Jerusalem. If it were so, his disciples didn’t ask Jesus where they could eat the Passover. As they did to bring a donkey in the past, they also trusted Jesus, obeyed and went. Here we learn one important lesson: that the redemptive work always accompanies obedience. God saves us through the work of obedience. God commanded Noah to build the ark of salvation. The Bible says that Noah did everything just as God commanded him. (Ge 6:22, 7:5) All animals obeyed Noah and entered the ark. Abraham obeyed God’s command and went even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he obeyed God when he was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. Moses and his people obeyed God’s command and killed animals and put their blood on their houses for Passover. Jesus’ disciples didn’t understand his instruction, but obeyed and went. Then, Jesus prepared the Passover. Trust and obey! There is no other way to be happy in Jesus and to make Jesus happy, but to trust and obey. Amen!

Second, betrayal (17-21) While Jesus was eating the Passover meal with his disciples, he predicted the betrayal of his disciple. In verse 18 he said, “***Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.***” It was shocking news to all of them. So, they were saddened, and one by one they said to Jesus, “***Surely you don’t mean me***?” (19) They asked Jesus to believe in their loyalty. But Jesus continued. “***It is one of the Twelve, one who dips bread into the bowl with me.***” (20) Jesus zoomed in on who was going to betray him. He is not an outsider, but one of the Twelve, Judas Iscariot. Jesus intentionally predicted his betrayal so that Judas might repent and turn to Jesus. Jesus showed his unchanging love even to Judas who was going to betray him. Jesus told the destiny of the betrayal in verse 21. “***The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born***.” Jesus predicted the sad ending of Judas’ life. Indeed, later Judas hanged himself after he had handed Jesus over to his enemies. Betrayal is one of the most painful feelings, especially when we are betrayed by the closest and most reliable people. Judas was one of the closest disciples. Jesus felt the same. But Jesus resolutely predicted his betrayal for the sake of Judas himself and other disciples. Jesus respected Judas’ free will to choose given by God. Jesus also helped other disciples to believe that his betrayal was in God’s plan which makes all things good for his redemptive work. The other disciples understood this later.

Third, the blood covenant (22-26) Look at verse 22. “***While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.***” During the Festival of the Unleavened Bread the Jews ate the unleavened bread to commemorate the Passover. But Jesus took the bread, broke it, and gave it to his disciples as his body. Breaking bread is more than just sharing. Here, breaking bread means tearing his body on the cross. Jesus illustrated what was going to happen to him on the cross. When the Roman soldiers nailed his hands and foot and pierced his side, his body would be torn. Once Jesus said while feeding people, “*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty*.” (Jn 6:35) Jesus compared himself to the bread of life for our eternal life. In John 6:51 Jesus said, “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world*.”

Jesus continued. Look at verses 23-24. “***Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many***.” In the Old Testament the cup indicates the wrath of God. But here the cup indicates Jesus’ blood, which is poured out on the cross. Jesus foretold his death on the cross beforehand to his disciples. Here we learn a few things hidden behind the blood covenant. A covenant is more than a contract between God and men. The content of the covenant is that the LORD will be our God and that we will be his people. This is like a marriage vow. God established his first covenant with Noah. (Ge 9:11). At that time God promised Noah not to judge the world with water again and gave a rainbow as the sign of the covenant. Then, God established his covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17 that God would make Abraham a blessing for the world. (Ge 15:18, 17:4) We call this the Abrahamic covenant. 430 years later God established a new covenant with his people Israel at Mount Sinai. We call this the Sinaitic covenant or Mosaic covenant. God said to his people, “*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant...you will be my treasured possession, and you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” (Ex 19:5,6) Since then, God renewed his covenant with many prophets. (Jer 31:33) Now this covenant is continued and is completed in the blood of Jesus. Whoever believes in Jesus’ blood will become a new creation. Whoever drinks the blood of Jesus by faith will receive eternal life. Jesus said in John 6:53-55. “*Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink*.”

Then, why did Jesus establish the new covenant in his blood? Blood represents life. Without blood no one survives. Also, without shedding blood there is no forgiveness of sin. The cost of our sin is as serious as a matter of life and death, and God paid the price of our sin only by the blood of Jesus. Hebrews 9:20,22 explains this well, “He said, “*This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.”... In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*” This is the reason why Jesus had to shed his precious blood on the cross. This is why Jesus asked his disciples to drink the cup during the Last Supper.

What does really eating the bread and drinking the cup mean during our holy communion? This means a union with Christ Jesus. Eating his body and drinking his blood indicates that we become one body with Christ. Jesus said in John 6:56. “*Whoever eats my flesh and drink my blood remain in me, and I in them.*” This is like the vine and branch relationship. What does ‘being united with Christ’ mean? It means that I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. Paul explained this in his letter to Christians in Rome, Corinth, and Galatia. “*Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death*?” (Ro 6:3) “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*” (2 Co 5:17). “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*.” (Gal 2:20) We admit the lordship of Christ over our lives by eating and drinking Jesus’ flesh and blood.

This is also the reason why Paul the Apostle warned the abuse of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29. “*So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves*.” In today’s passage we learn that Jesus himself became the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Just before he was arrested, Jesus established a new covenant in his blood. By eating his flesh and drinking his blood we become united with Christ. We no longer live, but Christ lives in us. By participating in his holy communion, we proclaim that the Lord is our God and that we are his people. Amen!

How is Christ present in the Lord’s Supper?

1. **Catholic view** on bread and wine during the communion: Transubstantiation:

Bread and wine **become** real Jesus’ body and blood. While Jesus is present at the communion, he transfers all the substances (bread & wine) into his real flesh and blood.

1. **Lutheran view** interpreted by **Martin Luther**: In, with, and under

Bread and wine **contain** Jesus’ flesh and blood as a sponge contains water. Water is not a sponge, but is present in, with, and under the sponge.

1. **Reformed Protestant’s** view interpreted by **John Calvin**: symbolic and spiritual presence. Bread and wine are just **symbolic**, not real body and blood of Jesus. But Jesus is present spiritually.

**(**from Systemic Theology written by Wayne Grudem)