

“The First Supper”

Mark 14:12-25

March 26, 2006

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We are called “evangelicals.”

The word is from the Greek word “euangelion” meaning “good news” or “gospel.”

We are people of good news.

This past Thursday, our children’s pastor, Than Baylor, reminded all of us on staff of this simple outline of human history:

Creation

Fall

Redemption

Glory

It begins with God’s creation of us and all else that exists apart from himself, who has always existed.

The first humans, Adam and Eve, lived in a paradise of plenty and in fellowship with God himself.

The biblical record however clearly points out that this relationship was short-lived because in the self-centeredness of pride Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God.

The result was a fall from the privileged position in which they had been living into one of condemnation, loss of relationship with God and distorted relationships with each other.

In Romans 5 God makes it equally clear that because of the solidarity of the human race, we all sinned in Adam and “fell” as did Adam and suffer the same consequences.

The Bible says in Romans 3:10-12 “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

It also says in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 “God will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord

Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord.

Or as Paul reminded the Romans (3:23; 6:23) "All have sinned and... the wages of sin is death."

That is bad news but it gets worse.

Eternal separation from God is our future and there is nothing **WE** can do about it.

Galatians 3:11 "Clearly no one is justified before God by the law" by being good enough.

Or as we are told in Ephesians 2:1 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins."

What started out as so beautiful quickly became very ugly.

I realize that in an affluent culture, in relatively stable homes, and in healthy bodies, it is very easy, especially for the young, to assume that all is well.

We certainly applaud the optimism with which youth faces the future.

But at the same time we know that optimism is unfounded outside of a relationship with God.

Because without God, sooner or later, everything dies!

Can man live without God? Yes, but not very well and not very long!

I have often thought and said that if God doesn't exist (as the atheist believes) or even if he's unknowable (as the agnostic believes), then life is pointless at best or a cruel joke at worst.

Samuel Beckett wrote a 35 second stage-play entitled "Breath" that depicted his understanding of life.

There were no actors on stage, only rubbish.

The play consisted of a recording of a brief cry, followed by an amplified recording of somebody slowly inhaling and exhaling accompanied by an increase and decrease in the light on stage.

There is then a second cry, and the plays ends.

That's the philosophy of nihilism; the belief that existence is senseless and useless.

That seems to me to be only logical alternative to belief in a personal God who somehow reaches into our world to rescue us from ourselves.

But a personal God does exist and reach into our world he does!

That's the third scene in human history – redemption.

This is God's gracious intervention in our lives.

This is God moving in to stop us from reaping the consequences of our choices and to give us life again.

Or as Jesus put it in John 17:3 "Now this is eternal life: that they may **know** you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

It is this redeeming act of God that forms the basis for the glory, the eternal life with God that is ours in Christ in the future.

That's the fourth scene in human history – Glory.

This is forever with God and his people on the new earth that God creates after Jesus comes again.

But it is mostly the third scene; the redemption of humanity, the saving of us, that the Bible is all about.

Most of what we call the Old Testament is pointing forward to a time in history when, in a decisive and momentous act, God would restore us humans to the place of relationship with Him that he created us to enjoy.

And most of the New Testament is a description of that momentous act and how it applies to us.

The NT books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are called the Gospels.

They are four accounts of the life of Jesus, which spell out the gospel, the good news, the evangel.

It is noteworthy that the final week of Jesus' life takes up a disproportionate amount of those accounts.

Everything in the OT and everything in Gospel accounts of Jesus' life are leading up to this week and most specifically to three days – the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus.

When we come to chapter 14 of the Gospel of Mark we have entered those last three days.

Because he is God, Jesus knew well the full significance of what was about to happen.

And in that knowledge he instituted a rite, a formal act, which the Bible calls The Lord's Supper.

And in that rite, he pulls together all the history of humanity that preceded this time and connects it to what he is about to do.

In him and what he will do is the culmination of human history.

Everything before leads up to him and everything since flows out of him.

The Lord's Supper then becomes the Gospel; it is the good news expressed in physical, tangible form.

1 Corinthians 11:26 (NASB) "For as often as you **eat** this bread and **drink** the cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death** until He comes."

It is no wonder then Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 22:15 "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

Jesus was excited about this Passover meal because it was very special – the time had now come for the fulfillment of all that 1500 years of Passover celebrations represented.

The Lord's Supper fulfills what the Passover meals had long represented.

Because the death of **the** Lamb of God fulfilled what the sacrificial lambs at the Passover represented.

Please stand in honor of God's word as I read Mark 14:12-26

"On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

^{MK 14:13} So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴ 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?' ¹⁵ He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

^{MK 14:16} The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

^{MK 14:17} When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸ While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me--one who is eating with me."

^{MK 14:19} They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely not I?"

^{MK 14:20} "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 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."

^{MK 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."

^{MK 14:23} Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

^{MK 14:24} "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."

^{MK 14:26} When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Many of you know that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was the longer holiday period in Jewish society that included the shorter Passover celebration.

But Passover was the main event.

And you know that the Passover celebration referred back to that first Passover when the angel of death passed over the Israelite homes, **sparing** the firstborn in those homes, as it **killed** the firstborn in the Egyptian homes, setting the stage for Israel to escape from 400 years of Egyptian slavery.

God redeemed his people from slavery and led them to the land he had promised them hundreds of years earlier.

Passover marked their salvation.

Passover marked their new beginning as the people of God.

Who they were and what their future would be flowed out of that event.

And at the heart of the event was the sacrifice of a lamb.

Each Israelite family was to take a perfect lamb and to slay it, sacrificing it in the place of their own firstborn sons, and they were to put the blood of that sacrificial lamb on the doors of their homes.

When the angel of death entered Egypt it would pass over those homes.

The blood of the lamb would save them.

As I said, for 1500 years Jewish people had been observing this ritual of Passover.

Three gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke, make a direct connection between that Passover and the Lord's Supper.

Jesus is excited to radically alter his disciples understanding of Passover by pointing them to the fulfillment of Passover.

And that fulfillment was what he would do in the next 36 hours covering parts of three days.

But before Mark gets to the fulfillment of the Passover celebration in the Lord's Supper he wants us to note something else that is very important.

He takes the time to show us that Jesus is in complete control of the people and events surrounding him.

Knowing that Jesus died, it would be easy to think of Jesus as a victim of the powerful Jewish and Roman officials of his day.

Many people, even today, consider Jesus to have been in the wrong place and the wrong time.

And thinking that way they see in his death little more than a sad story of martyrdom.

But Mark demonstrates that Jesus controlled every thing about what was happening.

He had apparently contacted both a guesthouse owner and another man and set up the codes that would be used to get his advance team to the right house to prepare for the Passover celebration.

And sure enough, when the two disciples go into the city they see a man carrying a water jug.

Only women carried such jugs in that day, so he was obvious.

Not only that, when they used the code words with the homeowner, he immediately let them in to prepare.

Then when they are eating, Jesus demonstrates that he knows exactly what will happen.

He predicts that one of the disciples will betray him.

The disciples have no idea of who it is and each is more worried whether it is him, than that Jesus will be betrayed.

But again Jesus demonstrates complete planning and control even in this when he says, Mark 14:21 "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him."

Might Jesus have had in mind Psalm 41:9

"Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

What is very evident is that Jesus was moving deliberately toward the event that brought him to earth.

- He held the authorities at bay in order to be in just the right place at the right time.
- He refused to let the crowds or his disciples rush him into the wrong objective or the wrong timing.
- He planned to be in Jerusalem at Passover and he planned to be the new Passover Lamb when he died on the cross.

And in that plan and timing he instituted the Lord's Supper.

Mark 14:22-25 "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."

MK 14:23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

MK 14:24 "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."

In Jesus' day the Passover celebration was observed in each home in the following way:

After sundown the family would gather.

1. The father would pronounce a blessing.
2. The first cup of wine would be served.
3. The food would be brought in but not yet eaten.
4. The son would ask why this night is special.
5. The father would recall the biblical account of the Passover redemption in Egypt.
6. Together the family would sing what is called the first part of the Hallel which is part of Psalm 113-115
7. Then the second cup of wine would be served.
8. Following that, the father would pronounce a blessing on the bread, which he then broke and distributed to everyone.
9. Then the meal of the sacrificed lamb was eaten.

10. After the meal the father would bless the third cup of wine with a prayer of thanksgiving.
11. Then the family would sing the second part of the Hallel from Psalm 116-118
12. Finally a fourth cup of wine would be served. (See notes in William Lane, *Mark*, 501-2)

Best I can determine, it is points 8-11 that Mark and the other gospel writers tell about.

It is time in the meal of the breaking of bread and then after the meal the time of the third cup that Jesus uses to establish the Lord's Supper.

And while the early Christian church continued to have a meal at the time of the Lord's Supper, the ritual itself had been simplified to the breaking of bread and the passing of the cup as Jesus did.

Now with all of that said, what does it mean to you?

From our historical perspective it is no wonder Jesus was eager to do this.

He knew how powerful and beneficial this ritual can be in our lives.

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

Jesus had often declared himself to be the bread of life.

Just as bread is necessary for physical life, so he, Jesus, is necessary for spiritual life. John 6:35 "Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry..."

As it is stated in 1 John 5:12 "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

When we eat this bread we take it into our bodies, symbolic of receiving Jesus into our lives.

It is **not** that we repeatedly become God's children or that we are saved over and over again when we participate in the Lord's Supper.

It **is** that the coming of Jesus into our lives is dramatically and repeatedly demonstrated.

And that very demonstration confirms over and over again to us that Jesus **has** become spiritual bread to us – Jesus in us is life.

When I eat that bread it symbolizes the very receiving of Jesus that has saved my life.

Then after the meal, Mark 14:23-24 “(Jesus) took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them.”

Just as he said the bread was his body, so here he says the cup, meaning the wine in it, is his blood.

I’ll come back to that in a minute, but notice he adds, “This is my blood **of the covenant** which is poured out for many.”

Here Jesus directly connects his death to the **new** covenant relationship with God that God is making with his people.

The Old Covenant, the old formal relationship, which we saw not too long ago in our study of Exodus 24, was made right after the Israelite exodus from Egypt, and was also made with blood – the blood of animals.

As I pointed out to you recently in a study of Hebrews 9, just as the Old Covenant was ratified by the bloody sacrifice of animals, so God the Son is the sacrifice that ratifies the new covenant.

Everyone knew that the blood of bulls and goats couldn’t take away sin.

But Christ Jesus came as the perfect sacrifice for sins and offered himself for us so that we could have a new relationship with God.

Or to go back to the Passover celebration, Jesus became the final and perfect Passover Lamb to provide for the redemption of his people.

His blood, meaning his death, was necessary to satisfy Divine justice against our sin and sinfulness - for the wages of sin is death.

But, 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Jesus we might become the righteousness of God.”

The death of Jesus makes possible a wholly different relationship with a holy God – we can belong to him forever.

Now back to the bread and the wine.

They symbolize the body and blood of Jesus.

But please understand that a **symbol** is exact and a symbol has power.

The Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C. reminds us of the war and the stark facts about it.

But the shape of it, as if gouging out the earth as the war did not only physically in Vietnam but also psychologically in our national conscience, along with the thousands of names engraved in black, bleak, sameness, causes us **to experience it** in some measure.

That Memorial is a powerful symbol.

Likewise the Lord’s Supper with its bread and cup, when accompanied by a reminder of the events they represent, not only reminds us but also **put us in that place** – we re-live the experience. (Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper*, 32)

The old spiritual sang, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

The Bible answers that: Romans 6:3-4 “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

So Jesus’ story is **our story** as we re-live it again and again in the Lord’s Supper.

When we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are acting out the gospel message again.

Augustine referred to the Lord's Supper as "The **visible** word of God."

Leonard Vander Zee has written, "As humbling as it may be, we need more than talk, more than words on a page; we need a touch, a smell, a taste – just as lovers need more than the words 'I love you' but also a kiss or an embrace. But the sacrament is more than a medium of communication; it is a medium of action, God's action."

(Vander Zee, 192)

God does something in us as we in faith participate in the Lord's Supper.

Another man wrote of the effects of kissing his young daughter.

"I kiss my daughter in order to love her as well as because I love her." (emphasis added)

Vander Zee adds, "Love requires **physical** expression. But does a kiss create love. Not exactly, but it is expected that the kisses will cause his love for his daughter to grow. The physical display of affection is the means and instrument by which love grows and increases. The kiss is a 'sacrament,' an outward and visible sign by which love is given the expression it craves and is given growth and strengthening in itself." (In Vander Zee, 67)

When we come to Jesus' words, in the Lord's Supper, about the bread being his body and the drink being his blood, we know that he is **not** saying that he is **physically** present in the bread and drink or that he **physically** enters us in the bread and drink.

He is saying that he is **spiritually** present and he comes to us. The ingesting of the bread and drink corresponds to the spiritual indwelling of Christ in us.

He is part of our very spiritual being, as food becomes part of our physical being.

This is a mystery to be sure but no less declared by God's word.

When we eat the bread and drink the wine, Jesus says it is, in one way, like eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

In other words, by faith we are taking **him** in, trusting **him**, reaffirming our faith, declaring anew our belief and trust in **him**.

And **in that** he ministers his grace to us to believe.

There is a mysterious synergy in this that we cannot fully explain.

- He offers us himself in the bread and cup.
- We obey and eat and drink, believing him.
- He ministers his grace to us to trust him more fully.

By faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, we become recipients of the grace behind the symbol as surely as we are recipients of the physical bread and cup.

So we are not just remembering an historical fact.

We are entering into that history again.

As I said before, his story is our story.

I invite you to receive him today.

If, before today, you have **not** received him by trusting him as your saving-Lord then we invite you to receive him, trust **him** today, even as you receive the bread and wine.

If you are **already** trusting Jesus, then receive his strengthening grace today as you re-live his story, your story.

Each time you participate in the Lord's Supper, remember this:

This is your story – birth, fall, redemption and glory – in Christ.

To be sure there will be many distractions, disappointments, discouragements and even distress between now and the time we see Jesus again, but the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:9

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him" --

Until we see him face to face, there could be no sweeter, more intimate fellowship with Jesus than what he offers us in the bread and cup.

He comes to us - **he** comes into us to commune with us, reassure us, strengthen us.

Receive him!

Other notes and resources begin on p 15

Other notes:

As to whether the meal with Jesus' disciples was the actual Passover meal (as in the Synoptic Gospels) or another meal just prior to Passover (as John seems to note) we cannot be absolutely certain but Mark clearly calls it the Passover meal. (See R.T. France *The Gospel of Mark*, 559ff for good review of the issues. Most commentaries deal with this issue).

The Passover not only commemorated the past event of the Exodus but looked forward to the Messiah's coming.

“In that night they were redeemed and in that night they will be redeemed in the future.” (Attributed to Rabbi Jehoshua b. Hananya c. A.D. 90 footnote in William Lane, *Mark*, 501).

After the meal the third cup is presented with the following words: “May the all-merciful One make us worthy of the days of the Messiah and of the life of the world to come. He brings the salvation of his king. He shows covenant-faithfulness to his Anointed, to David and to his seed forever. He makes peace in his heavenly places. May he secure peace for us and for all Israel. And say you, Amen.”

Should Christians celebrate Passover?

Some churches celebrate a seder (Jewish meal commemorating the Passover of Exodus) on Thursday evening of Holy Week.

While nothing prohibits a seder, it is clear from the NT that the Lord's Supper supercedes Passover or at least reinterprets it.

The Passover celebration passes over into the Lord's Supper celebration.

The type, the shadow passes over into the real and substantial. Just as a fruit blossom on a tree passes over into the fruit that it represented. (See *The Suffering Savior*, Krummacher, 44)

Passover celebrates a different event, namely the exodus from Egypt.

The Lord's Supper celebrates the cross.

Passover celebrates the old covenant.

The Lord's Supper celebrates the new covenant.

Passover, just like the other sacrifices of the OT, looks forward to the cross.

The Lord's Supper is the fulfillment of that and looks back on that event and forward to the end of the age.

Just as the sacrifice of Jesus completes, fulfills, the animal sacrifices of the OT, so the Lord's Supper completes, fulfills, the Passover.

I'm not terribly sympathetic to Christians (Gentile or Jewish) celebrating Passover since it has been fulfilled in Christ.

Leviticus 23:4 "The LORD's Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month.

Exodus 12:3-8 "Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household... ⁵ The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶ Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷ Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. ⁸ That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast."

The meal consisted of:

Unleavened bread ("bread of affliction" Deut 16:3)

Wine

Bitter herbs

Sauce of dried fruit, wine and spices

Roasted Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7 "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.")

"Remembering is not to entertain a pallid idea of a past event in one's mind, but to make the event present again so that it controls the will and becomes potent in our lives for good or ill." (Hunter in David Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary, Mark*, 534)

When we speak to each other there not only words but also “body language.”

The sacraments are God’s ‘body language’ to us. (Vander Zee, *Christ, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper*, 60-61)

“Eating Jesus’ body and drinking his blood is the most vivid way imaginable of being both participants and beneficiaries of his death on the cross and the resurrection by which it won victory over sin and death.” (Vander Zee, 153)

“Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in its sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed... spiritually receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then...really and spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements are to their outward senses.” (Westminster Confession 29.7)

“We have already seen that Jesus Christ is the only food by which our souls are nourished; but as it is distributed to us by the word of the Lord, which he has appointed an instrument for that purpose, that word is also called bread and water. Now what is said of the word applies as well to the sacrament of the Supper, by means of which the Lord leads us to communion with Jesus Christ. For seeing we are so weak that we cannot receive him with true heartfelt trust, when he is presented to us by simple doctrine and preaching, the Father of mercy, (condescending) to our infirmity, has been pleased to add to his word a visible sign, by which he might represent the substance of his promises, to confirm and fortify us by delivering us from all doubt and uncertainty. Since, then, there is something so mysterious and incomprehensible in saying that we have communion with the body and the blood of Jesus Christ, and we on our part are so rude and gross that we cannot understand the least things of God, it was of importance that we should be given to understand it as far as our capacity could admit.” John Calvin in “Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord”

Good resources:

Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, Leonard Vander Zee

I Corinthians, Craig Blomberg

The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Anthony Thistleton

Sunday Dinner, William Willimon

The Lord's Supper , Robert Letham
John, Donald Carson (re. John 6)
“*Westminster Confession of Faith*”
“*Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper*,” John Calvin