

THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

Mark 14:1-26

Key Verse: 14:24

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,'
he said to them."

Verse 1 says, "Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away..." This verse refers, in terms of Bible prophecy, to the day of our Lord Jesus Christ's crucifixion which was near--just two days away. Before his crucifixion, Jesus ate the last supper as the Passover meal with his disciples. We call it "The Lord's Supper." As he was eating the Lord's Supper, he said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." In saying this, Jesus indicated that he would become a ransom for many, just as the Paschal Lamb was killed at this Passover for the atonement of men's sins. May God help us know the deep meaning of his blood.

I. Jesus anointed at Bethany (1-11)

First, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (1-2). Look at verse 1a. The time was two days before the Passover. Following the custom, people who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem, as adult Jews, were bound to come to Jerusalem with sacrifice animals to observe the annual event of the Passover. Along with the Passover Feast, there are three more compulsory feasts. They are the Feast

of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 16:16). But the Feast of Unleavened Bread is closely connected with the Passover Feast. Perhaps many adult males were walking toward Jerusalem two by two, or three by three, or in groups, talking and sharing many unforgettable events which were virtually constant sufferings and hardships and a very little joy under Roman rule during the previous year. Obviously, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were on their minds. They must have remembered the historical significance of the glorious event of the Exodus, later celebrated as the Passover, which commemorated the deliverance of the people of Israel from their bondage in Egypt.

During this Passover time there were several kinds of people in the crowd. There were the chief priests and teachers of the law, who were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. But they were afraid of the people who might break out into a riot against them. Another kind were the ordinary people who were habitually observing the annual event. In this atmosphere, Jesus was preparing for his upcoming crucifixion as the Paschal Lamb--more clearly, as the ransom sacrifice for the sin of the world.

Second, a woman who broke the alabaster jar of perfume (3-6). While Jesus was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head (3). How did the people around her respond to her action? "Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor'" (4,5a). What they said seems to be their scintillating acumen for the

socioeconomic situation of the country. And their philanthropic clamor seems to be laudable. But their error was that they did not care for the woman who needed the hand of God's mercy. Moreover, they did not see the sacrificial character of a woman. They only saw the drops of perfume spilling from Jesus' head to his shoulders and to the floor. They rebuked her harshly, saying, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." In fact, they were not rebuking the woman, but they were rebuking their own spiritual blindness.

Let's see how Jesus saw this woman. Look at verse 6. "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me." What does it mean that she had done a beautiful thing to him? To Jesus, her pouring the expensive perfume on him was not a waste. It was a winsome and lovely act with an untenable charm to it. Maybe the perfume was for her marriage. Maybe she had purchased it by saving for a long time. But she broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. When she poured the perfume, in actuality she poured out her heart to Jesus. When she poured the perfume on him, she was pouring out her love to Jesus: She loved God with all her heart. She gave extravagantly all she had. Indeed, she gave all her soul to Jesus. She gave everything recklessly to Jesus because she saw God in Jesus. Sometimes we are moved to do something good for Jesus, but the tragedy is that the impulse is so often strangled at birth. Why? Because we calculate. But this woman was so impelled by her love for Jesus that she refused to count the cost. It was an act of love; it was a beautiful thing to Jesus.

She was happy when her sins were washed away. Probably she was the woman in Luke 7:36-50 who had lived a sinful life. While Jesus was eating at a Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. She came to Jesus as she was and asked his mercy for her sinsick soul by pouring out an alabaster jar of perfume. Jesus accepted her as she was. Jesus washed all her sins away when she came to Jesus as she was.

Third, Jesus accepted her perfume as anointing his body for burial (7-8). Look at verses 7-8. "The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." Jesus accepted her act of love in a most precious way. Jesus accepted her offering and honored it as anointing his body for burial in his redemptive history. Jesus said in verse 9. "I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." From time to time we wonder how far our material giving goes in getting rid of the forlorn destitution of the world, and how much it ameliorates the pain-stricken heterogeneous societies. But in this event we learn that what we give to Jesus is the only thing that lasts in the end, and this alone is remembered forever.

Fourth, Judas was a selfish person (10,11). Look at verses 10,11. Mark juxta-

poses Judas Iscariot with the woman to explain further what Jesus said to them concerning the woman. Judas Iscariot was the treasurer of the apostolic band. But he went to the chief priests to betray Jesus. After making a deal to hand Jesus over to them for thirty silver coins, he began to watch for an opportunity to hand him over. How could he do such an evil thing to his master Jesus? He could do such an evil thing to his master Jesus because his motive of following Jesus was not to learn of Jesus, but to get something out of Jesus. He loved money more than Jesus. John 12:6 says, "He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it." When Judas' motive was not pure, the devil came into his heart and made him extremely selfish until he was ready to get some money by selling his master Jesus. John 13:2 says, "The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus." The sinful desire for money can make anyone as selfish as a devil. Money itself is good and useful. But the love of money is the root of all evil (1Ti 6:10). When Judas Iscariot sensed that Jesus was drifting toward death on the cross, he was not able to remember how Jesus had loved him. He only thought that he lost too much for Jesus. As a result, he was ready to get something out of Jesus.

Both Luke and John say quite simply that the devil entered into Judas (Lk 22:3; Jn 13:27). In the last analysis, Judas followed Jesus not to become a disciple of Jesus, but he followed Jesus to work out the desires of his heart. Then sweet Satan did not leave him alone. The devil tempted him to become a small devil. Dante sets Judas in the lowest of all hells, which was a hell of

cold and ice, a hell designed for those who were cold and selfish sinners against the love of God.

II. The Lord's Supper (12-26)

First, the Passover meal was well-prepared (12-21). Look at verse 12. Two days had already passed. Now it was 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?" Apparently, eating the Passover was quite significant to them. Nonetheless, they could not afford a room in which to eat the Passover. So the disciples came to Jesus urgently, and asked about where they might prepare and eat the Passover.

What, then, did eating the Passover mean to them? It had a historical meaning (Ex 12). It commemorated the deliverance of the people of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. In the book of Exodus we read that God sent plague after plague on Egypt, and as each plague came, Pharaoh promised to let the people go. But when each plague abated, he hardened his heart and broke his promise. Finally, there was no other option. He had to choose either to let the people go or to see God strike down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well (Ex 12:29). But Pharaoh made a choice to kill all the firstborn rather than to curb his pride. Pharaoh's pride invited tragic disaster on his people. Pharaoh's pride caused

his firstborn son to die by the plague. In the meantime, the Israelites were to slay a lamb. With a bunch of hyssop they were to smear the lintels of the doorposts with the blood of the lamb, and when the angel of death saw the doorposts so marked, he would pass over that house, leaving its residents safe.

Therefore, eating the Passover meant commemorating the deliverance from the yoke of slavery in Egypt. It was the great commemoration of the great love of God who delivered them from the hands of Pharaoh. The preparation for eating the Passover applies to the preparation of our hearts to eat the body and drink the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ for the sake of liberation from the power of sin. In order to eat the Passover, the Israelites had to slay a sinless, one-year-old lamb and sprinkle its blood on the doorposts for their deliverance. They roasted the meat of the lamb and ate it to satisfy their stomachs. The Passover lamb was called the paschal lamb, and this lamb was completely sacrificed. This animal sacrifice is the symbol of the real Paschal Lamb, Jesus Christ. Mark 10:45 says, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

How did they make preparations? Jesus instructed two of them how to look for a room. Look at verse 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?'" In reality, Jesus did not have even a studio apartment. But he did not think that he had nothing. He thought that everything was his because he is the Creator God. Jesus' instructions show that he is God--even

when he was about to die as a ransom sacrifice for many.

How did the disciples respond? They left and went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. It was hard for the disciples to obey the order of Jesus, but they obeyed Jesus' command simply. In this way, Jesus prepared the Lord's Supper, a historical event in the New Testament.

They were ready to eat the Passover; but Jesus had a serious problem. One of his disciples was going to betray him (18). He was Judas Iscariot. He was not interested in political ambition like James and John. Judas Iscariot was interested in money. He was indeed on the sub-human level. How did Jesus treat him? Jesus could have told the other disciples plainly and let him go his way. But Jesus did not do that. Instead, he told them indirectly by saying that there was one who would betray him. He said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me--one who is eating with me." Jesus said this because he wanted to convict Judas Iscariot of his sin of betrayal so that perhaps he might repent and turn to God.

How did the disciples respond to this shocking news? They were saddened and one by one said to him, "Surely not I!" "Maybe it's I!" They were too sorrowful to eat the Passover. The Passover was a part of God's will for world salvation. This is the reason they had to bear the unbearable pain and sorrow. Here we learn that an evil man causes many people to suffer much.

While they were wondering, Jesus said, "It is one of the Twelve." Jesus also told about the result of betraying him, by saying, "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" (21). Judas' betrayal does not hinder God's work of salvation at all. But his betrayal brought woe to himself. Jesus gave him the opportunity to repent. But he hardened his heart because of money, and he betrayed Jesus. Judas Iscariot became a person for whom it would have been better not to have been born. We shudder at Judas. But we must know that Judas is a warning to those who loved money more than God. His love of money did not make him happy. History brands him as a betrayer of Jesus. Judas Iscariot is a warning to each of us.

Second, this is my body and blood (22-26). Let's look at verse 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.'" As the Israelites satisfied their stomachs by eating the meat of lambs, men can really satisfy themselves when they take the body of Jesus. Jesus is the Bread of life. John 6:35 says, "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." These days there are many people who are depressed even though they eat a lot. But Jesus satisfies man's soul. Here, eating the body of Jesus means sharing Jesus' own life. This implies that Jesus' body would be crucified on the cross so that through his death men may find salvation from their sins.

Look at verse 23. "Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it." He went on to say, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (24). What does "my blood of the

covenant" mean? It has deep roots in the Bible. The main meaning of the "new covenant" refers back to the old covenant. But John the Baptist condensed this idea most excellently by saying, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29) Jesus came to the world to die on the cross to pour out his holy blood to cleanse our sins. As we know well, blood is life. Praise and thanks be to Jesus who gave his life to save us from our sins.

At this point we have to think about why Jesus had to suffer so much even before receiving physical abuse on the cross. In brief, Jesus suffered so much in order to save us from the power of sin. First of all, sin makes our blood sick. There was a Buddhist monk who was very famous because of his wide knowledge and noble character. The people of the time thought that the great monk transcended the mundane world and was not able to become infatuated with a woman. In his time there was a woman whose beauty and charm were matchless in the aristocratic society. Once the great monk saw her. Then he forgot all about the teachings of Buddha and became a romantic poet. How about her? She fell in love-sickness with him all her lifetime. In short, they were ruled by their sinful natures.

After the reign of the Anglo-Saxons (450-1066), with the invasion of the Danish Vikings and the Normans, mutilation was introduced as a form of punishment in England. It was legitimized by King Canute (995-1035). Mutilation was thought to prevent a person from repeating a particular crime. Thus thieves and counterfeiters had their hands cut off, liars and perjurers their

tongues torn out, spies their eyes gouged out, those guilty of rape and women guilty of adultery had their noses cut off. The practice of mutilation was finally discontinued because it was generally proven not to be a deterrent to crime; those mutilated would often continue to commit the same crime. Later, trial by ordeal was replaced with trial by jury and verdict. Because of the law of mutilation there were many beautiful women without noses; very handsome young people without hands. Romans 7:21-24 reads as follows: "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" This is the reason God had to shed his Son's blood to save men from the torment of sin and death.

No one can ransom others from their sins. Only the holy blood of Jesus can cleanse our sins. There have been many saints and men of great wisdom. It is interesting to read their books. But none of them talked about the problem of sin, that is the root problem of all mankind. Especially none of them talked about men's eternal salvation or eternal life in the kingdom of God. But Jesus is the only one who talked about men's eternal life and a living hope in the kingdom of God. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sinful desires, as well as from our sinful habits. Twentieth century science has failed to heal man's sinsickness. But the blood of Jesus cleanses and purifies our sin-stained blood. Only the blood of Jesus can heal sinsick people when they come to Jesus as they are. The blood of Jesus heals our pain and sorrows, the hatred and anger in our hearts. Those who are cleansed by the

blood of Jesus can have new desires from God and they can do something fruitful. It is the promise of God that he would send his Son to die on the cross, to shed his blood for our sins. This is why the Bible writers call it the blood of the covenant. But when Jesus was shedding his blood the earth shook and the rocks split (Mt 27:51b). He also made a new heaven and earth. Through the shedding of his blood, Jesus opened the way for all men to have eternal salvation and a living hope in the kingdom of God. Jesus' shedding blood is everything to everybody. So Jesus said, "I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God" (25). After the supper they sang a hymn and they went out to the Mount of Olives to pray (26).

May the blood of Jesus cleanse all our sinsicknesses. May the blood of Jesus make us pure and humble children of God so we may live with joy and the peace of God in this troubled world.