

August 18th 2013: The Jesus The Word Sees #10 Mark 14:12-26 "The Lord's Supper"

Today is our Hosts and Hordes Sunday and the majority of us will be fellowshiping together after this service in the homes of our brothers and sisters in Christ. And it seemed most apt to me that the message in my present series for today is also about a fellowship meal for believers.

A fellowship meal that was created by Jesus for His followers on the night that He was arrested. We call it the Lord's Supper, because it is a meal belonging to the Lord to which we are privileged to be invited. When Jesus first instituted it He invited only the twelve who had committed themselves to be His followers to take part in it, and through them passed it on to the early church as a feast that was not for all and sundry, but only for those who truly believed in Him, and through that belief had been included by Him in His Kingdom.

The importance for Jesus of this meal is obvious from Luke 22:14-15

- ¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.***
¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

Literally Jesus says, with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you, and to enable that to happen Jesus put a lot of effort into planning it.

He secretly arranged for a large upper room to be available, furnished and provisioned for the feast. He worked out a system by which only Peter and John knew the location of that room by following a man carrying a water jug, and then Jesus brought the rest of the disciples to join them there at the appointed time.

He made sure that there was no way that Judas could know in advance of this place and bring His enemies there. The feast so full of meaning had to take place for the sake of those disciples and for the church through the ages. Jesus set it in place as an ongoing sacrament for you and me and we must never undervalue it, misuse it, or avoid being present for it, if it is at all possible. It is the Lord's supper and we do well to remember that it is only because of His grace that we can and should come to it. *There is a story of a communion service at which Dr Duncan of Edinburgh was presiding. In the front pew there was a woman weeping and obviously distressed over her own spiritual state. As the elder was proceeding along the line handing the cup first to one and then to another, this weeping woman shook her head and bade the elder omit her. At once perceiving the spiritual situation, the minister stepped down, gently took the cup from the elder*

and stepping back, held it to the woman and said: "Take it, woman, it's for sinners."

For sinners indeed, but for sinners who have been redeemed. That was the strong message that Jesus declared in that feast.

For it was the Passover feast that Jesus invited His followers to and to which He gave additional meaning. For even as the Passover feast celebrated the deliverance of the Israelites from the judgment of God that fell upon the Egyptians, so the feast that Jesus gave celebrates the deliverance of His followers from the judgment of God that will one day come upon mankind.

Jesus often spoke to His followers about the judgment that is to come, and as he prepares to die He needs them to know that whatever life throws at them in terms of pain, suffering, persecution and frustration, He as the sacrificial lamb has covenanted to cleanse them through the shedding of His blood.

John Dickson writes: (p94) ***"In Jesus' day the male representative of the household brought a lamb to the Jerusalem Temple on the afternoon of the fourteenth of the month of Nisan. After presenting it to one of the thousands of priests on duty that day, the worshipper killed the animal while the priest caught the blood in a sacred bowl that he passed back along the priestly line to be tossed against the base of the Temple altar. The Passover lamb, then, was far more than a simple memorial; it had a clear sacrificial dimension. Its blood was literally poured out before the Lord and its fatty portions offered to Him in sacrifice."***

Mark tells us that Jesus at that meal took a cup, gave thanks and offered it to His disciples and they all drank from it. Then Jesus said to them

'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,'

My blood He said. Not a lamb's blood but my blood, is poured out to ratify this new agreement that God is making with many, beginning with you.

Those men, with the exception of Judas, would suffer violent lives and violent deaths for their belief in and labours for Jesus and His kingdom. But they would never forget whatever they faced in life, that they would never endure judgment against sin. There would be many times that they would meet behind closed doors with other believers because of persecution, even as believers in some countries still do today, and as they took the cup they would be reminded again that they were safe from the wrath of God that is to come.

In Luke's version of this meal he records Jesus as saying: **"This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you."**

With that word in also meaning 'resting'. The new covenant says Jesus, rests upon my blood. My blood poured out for many is the reason why your eternal future is rock solid.

That's why every time a believer takes that cup at a communion feast, they can be certain that despite all the rotten things they may be going through in this life, nothing can ever change the fact that the agreement God has with them regarding freedom from judgment is based on the blood of the lamb, and that will stand for eternity.

There was yet one other part of that feast that Jesus wanted His disciples to do again often, because of the great encouragement it would be for them to keep on living out their lives for Him.

It relates to the bread. Luke tells us in 22:19

And 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."

We often hear said at the communion table, "This is my body broken for you", but in fact there is no record of Jesus saying that. This is my body given for you were His words, and that is so powerful when you think of it. He gave His Body for us and He likened it to bread that sustains. Bread that gives and sustains life.

No doubt those disciples would have been reminded as Jesus said that, of the words He proclaimed to them after the feeding of the five thousand recorded for us in John 6

⁵¹ 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.'

Then just a little further on He says:

⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

Jesus knew what lay ahead for those disciples and all others who, through the centuries, would choose to follow Him. He knew that we would not survive the perils and demands of discipleship in our own strength—depending on our own resources. That's why He emphasizes at this last supper that He is for every

believer the Bread that gives life. The Bread that sustains, strengthens, enables. The Bread we must feed on.

Consequently every time we take this bread at a communion feast Jesus wants us to be reminded that as we eat of that bread so we must daily feed on Him. Seek His power to do what we do. His strength to survive what we must survive. His sustaining grace to keep us day by day.

We feast on Him by our determination to know Him more and to live out His purposes for us. By our dedication to speaking to Him about everything and making Him Lord of all we say and do

It's too easy to live life and only feast on Jesus when we want too. He gave His life for more than that. That's why every communion feast gives us the opportunity to check out our daily dependency on Jesus, and to recommit ourselves to feasting always on Him.

There is so much that we think is so vital to our existence that we can do without. Even such things as our health, our income, our freedom. But the one thing we can never do without is the Bread of Life. Jesus Himself. And at every communion Jesus assures us that we don't have to.

So the Lord's Supper is for us a reminder of what the Lord has done for us through the shedding of His blood, and what He is now to us every day as the Bread that sustains and gives life. But also it is a commemoration of that day when we gave our lives to Him. When we said, "I will follow Jesus".

And therefore every communion service should be a renewal of our commitment to the Lord.

There is a word that is used by some to refer to the communion feast and it is the word sacrament. It comes from the Latin sacramentum which was the word used for the oath that the Roman soldier gave to the Emperor, and came to mean any sacred and binding obligation that a person entered into.

Every time we come to the Lord's supper we should be aware again of the sacred and binding obligation that we have entered into with Jesus. He is Saviour and Lord of our lives and every time we eat the bread and drink the cup we observe an ordinance in which the heart goes out and pledges itself afresh in loyal devotion and love to the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour.