

## THE NEW COVENANT IN JESUS' BLOOD

Luke 22:1-23

Key Verse: 22:20

*In 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."*

Today's passage describes the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples. We tend to associate this with Leonardo da Vinci's painting that captured the moment when Jesus' disciples were shocked by his prediction of betrayal. Judas Iscariot is holding a moneybag. Others seem to ask him, "Is it I, Lord?" It is an interesting portrayal of the event. But the key point of the Last Supper was something else. It was the new covenant in Jesus' blood. This new covenant is at the core of Christian faith. May God help each of us to accept the new covenant in Jesus' blood through this study!

### I. JUDAS' BETRAYAL (1-6)

Look at verses 1-2. *"Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people."* The Passover was the most important festival for the people of Israel. The religious leaders should have focused on educating their children about the meaning of the Passover. Instead, they were looking for ways to kill Jesus. They tried to trap him with trick questions such as "Should we pay taxes to Caesar?" and "If a woman is married to seven brothers, whose wife will she be in resurrection?" Each time, however, they were humiliated by Jesus' words of wisdom. So they looked for other ways to get rid of him. Still, they couldn't do anything openly because they knew that most people would be on his side. They found a way, however. To their delight, one of his own disciples approached them with an offer.

Look at verses 3-4. *"Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus."* Luke says that Satan entered Judas, and he became a betrayer. This is shocking. Judas was one of the Twelve. He was called by Jesus. He followed Jesus for more than three years. One time, Jesus gave his disciple power and authority to drive out demons and heal the sick. Jesus prepared them to take over his earthly ministry. Now Satan entered Judas Iscariot. What does it mean Satan entered him? It means that Judas allowed Satan to enter and control his heart. He would do what Satan told him to do. How could this happen to a disciple of Jesus? It happened because he did not repent his desire for money, even as he followed Jesus. He left the door of his heart ajar for Satan to enter. When Satan entered him, Judas went to the religious leaders to discuss how he might betray Jesus. The religious leaders were delighted at the proposition. They agreed to give him money. Verse 6 says, "He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present."

Judas' betrayal gives us the chills. How could he even think of betraying the Lord? He saw how Jesus the Son of God rebuked the hurricane-strength wind. He saw how Jesus fed a crowd of 5,000 with only five loaves of bread and two fish. He witnessed with his own eyes how Jesus the Shepherd opened the eyes of a man born blind. He saw how Jesus healed an invalid of 38 years. Most of all, he saw how Jesus loved the disciples like his own children. So how could he betray the Lord? It happened because he never fully committed his life to Jesus. Money was on his mind. Half of his heart was on money and only the other half on Jesus. He was sitting on the fence between Jesus and money. He didn't listen to Jesus when he said that we cannot serve two masters. He probably imagined the day he would become the treasury secretary in the kingdom Jesus would establish and lucrative contracts that would follow the position. To his disappointment, however, Jesus began to talk about suffering and dying on a cross. Judas realized that Jesus' vision did not agree with his own plan. He began to look for a way out before it was too late. We shudder at what Judas did to our Lord. But this begs for a serious question. Can this happen to us? After all, it happened to one of the Twelve. What is the answer? In Luke 9:23, Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." We learn that if we do not fully commit our hearts to the Lord, if we leave the door of our hearts open even a little bit, yielding to our sinful desires, it can happen to us. We must take these words to heart and commit our lives to Christ. We are weak, but he is strong. He will help us when we truly commit our lives to him. However, if we leave a door open, we Satan can take advantage of us. We should not underestimate Satan. He is our formidable enemy. But we should also know that Satan cannot hurt us if we are with God. We sometimes wonder why God allows him to remain powerful, even though we know that in the end he will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity. God has his reasons. He may tolerate the work of Satan for the time being and use it for his own good purpose. John Calvin said that God tolerates demons to punish uncommitted people. God wants us to commit our lives to Christ. Then we become strong to resist the devil. May God help each of us to commit our lives fully to Christ!

## II. THE LAST PASSOVER (7-16)

Look at verse 7. "*Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.*" The Feast of Unleavened Bread lasted seven days, following the Passover celebration. God told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover so that they might remember the grace of his deliverance from their slavery in Egypt. The Israelites were subject to harsh labor. The heat consumed them as they carried mud bricks on their bare backs. The slave masters whipped their drained bodies without mercy. They moaned and groaned in their agony. They cried out to God, and God heard their groans. He raised Moses as their leader to deliver them from their slavery. But Pharaoh, king of Egypt, would not let them go. God sent many plagues on Egypt, yet Pharaoh would not submit to God. Finally, God gave Pharaoh an ultimatum: either let the people go or see God strike down all the firstborn in Egypt (Ex 12:29). Pharaoh did not listen to God. So God sent an angel of death to kill all firstborn sons, including the king's son. That night, there were cries of women everywhere in Egypt who were holding their dying sons in their arms. Meanwhile, God told the Israelites to slay a lamb and eat the meat. And they were to smear its blood on the doorposts of their houses. When the angel of death saw

the blood, he passed over the houses. This was the Passover. To celebrate the Passover meant to remember God's grace of deliverance from their slavery.

The Passover this time was special to Jesus and his disciples. Jesus told Peter and John, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." But where would they go to find a place? The city of Jerusalem was crowded with many people who came for the festival. All the facilities were booked up. What did Jesus say to them? Look at verses 10-12. *He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there."* Jesus kept the location secret perhaps to keep Judas from giving advance notice to the Jewish leaders. Furthermore, his disciples once again learned about the lordship of Jesus. All they had to do was to obey the word of Jesus and say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" Look at verse 13. "They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover."

When evening came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. He said to them, *"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God"* (15-16). Jesus expressed his heart's desire to his disciples. It was to eat this Passover with them before he suffered. Jesus had been looking forward to this moment for a long time. Why? It was time for him to teach them the meaning of his suffering and death on the cross. Until this time, Jesus simply told them that he would suffer, die and rise again. But now, for the first time, he would explain the meaning. The backdrop of the Passover would provide a basis for them to finally understand the meaning of his suffering and death on the cross. In Egypt, the angel of death passed over the houses with the blood smeared on the doorposts. Likewise, in the final judgment, the angel of death will pass over those who are sanctified by the blood of Jesus. This is our Passover. And Jesus promises that our Passover will culminate in the heavenly banquet in the kingdom of God.

### III. THE NEW COVENANT (17-23)

Look at verses 17-18. *After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."* Jesus told them that this was his last meal before they would eat again in the kingdom of God. Then Jesus told them something very significant. Look at verse 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."* At this Last Supper, there was no roasted lamb for Jesus and the disciples to eat. There was bread and there was wine. But where was the lamb? Jesus himself was the Lamb. John the Baptist said about Jesus, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). When Jesus offered himself as the Lamb of God for the sin of the world, it was once and for all. There is no longer a need for a lamb. The Son of God became our Passover Lamb. He was sacrificed to redeem us from our slavery to sin. Now we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Look at verse 19 again. *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."* The body of Jesus was broken when he was crucified. He said the bread was his body given for us. This reminds us of John 6:35. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." After eating the Passover lamb, the Israelites set out on their pilgrimage to the Promised Land. Now Jesus provides spiritual food for us on our holy pilgrimage to the kingdom of God. Jesus sacrificed his body on the cross for us. Spiritually speaking, his death renews our relationship with God so that we may eat the word of God as the bread of life every day. Before eating the bread of life that Jesus gives, all sinful people are hungry in their souls. They cannot but live as restless wanderers on the earth like Cain in Genesis. Nicodemus was a high ranking official with power and money, but he felt empty inside. The Samaritan woman had many men in her life, but she was still lonely and thirsty for love. But their lives were changed when they met Jesus. Things of this world can satisfy us only for a while. We become thirsty and hungry again and again. Only Jesus the living bread can truly satisfy our souls.

Let us read verse 20 together. *In 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."* The cup contained the fruit of the vine. Jesus said that this symbolized his blood and marked the beginning of a new covenant. So what was the old covenant, and how is the new covenant different from the old? The old covenant was based on the law of God and animal sacrifices in the Old Testament. Every year, Jewish people had to kill animals and sprinkle their blood for atonement for their sins. The old covenant was sealed in the blood of animals. It was necessary, but temporary. It was only a precursor of what was to come. It lacked the power to really change people from the inside. Their sin remained and they had to kill animals again and again. But the new covenant is different. Jeremiah 31:31-34 says: "'The time is coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It 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 the Lord. 'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. '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. ... For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'" God faithfully kept his part of the old covenant. But his people did not keep their part. They broke the covenant. They invalidated the covenant. But the new covenant is different. It is sealed in Jesus' blood. It does not depend on our ability to keep the laws. It is based on the one-sided grace of God. The Son of God shed his blood on the cross to wash away all our sins.

The Bible declares that everyone is sinner before God. There is no one righteous, not even one. You may consider yourself a good person. You never stole anything, you never killed anyone, you never committed adultery, and so on. But Jesus said if you see a woman and have a lustful desire, you have already committed adultery. Sin happens in your heart. How can we say we are not sinners before the holy God? Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (who wrote the Sherlock Homes mysteries) was known for his practical jokes.

Once he sent a note to some of his friends in prominent positions. The note said, "Your sins have been discovered. Hide!" The note was delivered anonymously. In the next dinner party, his friends were puzzled by the sudden disappearance of some people. We also have to admit that we are indeed sinners before God. Many people really want to be good and try to do good, but they feel miserable when they realize that they sin instead. They know they cannot claim to be righteous before God. They are unhappy because of their guilt. They are weighed down by their burden of sin. They often look for a way out of this in the wrong places such as wild parties, drugs, and other pleasures. Sin is a terrible disease that no medical doctor can cure. We often feel the burden of life when we go through difficulties in our jobs, school, relationship with others, our health, and so on. However, the ultimate burden comes from our sin. Unless our sin problem is solved, no matter how much improvement is made in our lives, we cannot be happy. And this is where the amazing news comes to us from God. Jesus solved our sin problem by dying on the cross. He shed his blood to wash away our sin-stained blood. He set us free from sin and death to give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. We are God's children! People are helpless before the power of sin and death. Only the blood of Jesus can deliver them from the slavery of sin. Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse and purify our sin-stained blood. Only the blood of Jesus can heal us from our sickness called sin. Only the blood of Jesus can heal our pain and sorrow, the hatred and anger in our hearts. Ultimately, the blood of Jesus recreates us as new persons so that we can experience the love of God. Those who are cleansed by the blood of Jesus also have new desires to love God and to serve him. What an amazing thing Jesus has done for us when he shed his blood on the cross!

We must not underestimate the power of sin. Sin is like cancer that starts as a tiny cell but spreads to the entire body to kill the person. The power of sin is real. It kills not only our body but our soul. There is nothing in the world that can help us. Only the blood of Jesus can heal us. So, when Judas rejected Jesus, there was no remedy for him. Look at verse 22. *"The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!"* Judas' end was terrible indeed. Driven by the power of darkness, he committed suicide. He thought he was smart. He thought he was leaving his options open. But in the end his life ended tragically.

Only Jesus' blood can cleanse our hearts and souls from the power of sin and restore the holiness of God in us. Only the blood of Jesus can bring us into a new covenant with God. Let us accept the blood of Christ and live as his children!