

# The Last Supper: An Unfinished Meal

Mar 14:22-26

To The Village Church, March 19, 2006

Main Idea: Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper guarantees His coming back to get us, so rest in His love.

Meditation:

## This Bread I Break

This bread I break was once the oat,  
This wine upon a foreign tree  
Plunged in its fruit;  
Man in the day or wind at night  
Laid the crops low, broke the grape's joy.

Once in the wine the summer blood  
Knocked in the flesh that decked the vine,  
Once in this bread  
The oat was merry in the wind;  
Man broke the sun, pulled the wind down.

This flesh you break, this blood you let  
Make desolation in the vein,  
Were oat and grape  
Born of the sensual root and sap;  
Mine wine you drink, my bread you snap.  
--Dylan Thomas

Post-Sermon Song Theme:

Benediction:

May the meal we have now shared be a means for you of communing with Jesus Christ.

Charge:

Go forth into your city, bringing with you the promise in your heart that He is coming back for you.

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# I. The Bond of Communion at the Village Church

## A. The prominence of the sacrament at TVC

1. When I first came here, many different voices, re women's roles, re worship music style, re preaching, re how to do things in the Session, re who gets emphasized in the congregation. One agreement: Don't touch our weekly communion.
2. Can point out people who love communion here, even if I don't know much else about them.
3. Why? Because communion forms a bond in this community to God. Which is just what it is supposed to do.

## B. A Moment for the Twelve

1. Functioned same way in this passage.
2. I say, "Thank you" to TVC for helping me to grow in the Eucharist, to understand the bond of the Lord's Supper. We are going to spend some time today understanding what Communion is, so that we can all partake of it with the import it really has and receive the grace through it that is there for us.
3. **V17**-We saw, last week, how this is a moment for the Twelve. This is the climax of the internship of these disciples. Their personal educational program with the pre-resurrection Jesus Himself reaches a conclusion here.
4. And He wants to form a bond.

## C. The Bond of a Covenant

1. Jesus uses this word, "covenant." This word, "diagh, kh", or covenant, is used in the gospels for this utterance of Jesus and, apart from one other reference by Luke<sup>1</sup>, used *only* here at the last supper. It was a special moment, the giving of the sign and seal of a covenant.
2. We use this word a lot at The Village Church. I want to try to tell you why, today.
3. This word, "covenant." Definition from O. Palmer Robertson:

Covenant = a bond in blood, sovereignly administered.

		Terms are dictated. Parties not of equal parity*
	extends to ultimate issues of life and death	
Prominence of oath and signs.		

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<sup>1</sup> Luk 1:72.

4. 3 parts to that definition: Bond—
  - Forms a relationship between two parties
  - It is done using oaths or, in this passage, a solemnity of ceremony. When Jesus took the Passover bread, He was using a current ceremony but infusing it with new meaning. And the disciples knew something was going down. There was sacrament in the air.
  - Critics try to say that, oh this is how we know this didn't happen, because the early church treated it like a ceremony, so they must have read their ceremony back into the narrative. It doesn't seem to occur to them that maybe the early church performed the Lord's Supper as a ceremony because Jesus taught them to do so, right here, by recalling the ancient God-in-History method of covenant-making.
  - Honestly, considering how Jesus viewed the OT, it would be surprising if Jesus did not at some point explain what He was doing in terms of a covenant.
  
5. “Sovereignly administered “
  - There are not equal terms. One party is dictating the terms to the other.
  - God determines the terms.<sup>2</sup> Because He is the One making it happen.
  - Recall Deuteronomy—the whole form of the book was a Suzerain-Vassal Treaty. It was a Covenant Renewal of this people.
  
6. In Blood—It costs something
  - This relationship, this bond with God, costs something to happen. It costs something very dear, a matter of life and death.
  - **V24**-Literally: “This is my blood of the covenant.” I.e., “The covenant is in my blood.”

What does Jesus mean when He speaks of “the covenant”?

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<sup>2</sup> Divine covenants (between God and man) do not appear outside Scripture--no convincing parallels in the pagan world.

## II. The Bond of God's Covenant through History

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### A. Previous Covenants

1. If you read the Bible a lot, you only need someone to point this out to you and you start to see this all over the place where before you didn't before.
2. A theme that runs throughout the sacred writings from beginning to end, and binds them all together, is the concept, and the word "covenant." Let me cite some examples:
  - God makes a covenant at the beginning with Adam:
    - Gen 2:15-17 describes.
    - described by Hosea (Hos 6:7) as being broken.
  - Adam: A new covenant described (though not named) in Gen 3:15.
  - Noah: A further dispensation of that covenant, to preserve the earth for His program of working His way back to fellowship with humanity. He tells Noah, "I will establish my covenant with you..." (Gen 6:18, 9:9), for the sake of, and to include, all of Noah's descendents.
  - Abraham: "The Lord made covenant with Abraham" (Gen 15:18). To make a great people on the earth in order to commune with them.
  - Moses: I am establishing this covenant with you Moses and the children of Israel in order for you to be
    - —I quote—"my treasured possession" (Exo 19:5). A bond.
    - Moses comes down from Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments, in Exo 24:8 —"Behold, the blood of the covenant."
  - Didn't Stop: David: On his deathbed, the great King looks back and says: "God has made with me an everlasting covenant..." And then he talks about, in relation to this covenant, how God will bring to fruition his salvation, and how in God is the answer to every desire (**2Sa 23:5**). And then he dies.
3. So, through thousands of years of history, God keeps showing up, making this covenant with, and through, certain individuals for a group of people. In all these administrations of The Covenant, God is taking steps to commune with us, once the first covenant with Adam was broken.
4. So, God preserved the earth, created a people, gave them Law and a King, all in order to be present with them: to have communion, greater and greater communion, with a people.

## B. The Covenant between Jesus and the Father

1. This covenant in **v24** is that same covenant:<sup>3</sup>
  - After Jesus left the Earth, Simon Peter gives a sermon in the temple, and he puts it this way (Act 3:25): "...You are heirs...of the covenant God made with your fathers."
  - Jesus Christ, in fact, is calling Himself the consummation of all of these previous dispensations of the covenant. Before this night, described in this passage, there were six times when God came and made covenant with a man. And Jesus is saying, Here's the last. Here's the one that wraps up all those previous administrations of the covenant and takes the last step of God's coming to commune with women and men.
2. And just as God made this covenant with individual men for their people, the Father now makes covenant with the man, Jesus Christ, for His people. And this administration provides the greatest bond with God anyone can know.
3. Isn't this beautiful? God goes to a great deal of trouble to make a way for you to know Him, to work His way back into our hearts.

## C. The Signs through which we commune with Him

1. And in each time of continuing, and building up, the bond of God with people, God would give a sign and a seal to communicate the reality of the covenant.
2. Something so that His people would regularly know His commitment to them. It was very important. And they would know *Him* in participation of the sign. The signs were the way that people bonded to God.
3. It is important to understand how God made these signs, or you will misunderstand the Bible's stories. Let's take, for example, the sign of the covenant that God gave to Noah.
  - **Gen 9:12** "And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup> I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth."
  - So the sign of that phase of the covenant was the rainbow in the sky. God took something ordinary and said, "I am going to give this a meaning, between you and me, and you are going to know me through this meaning, when you participate in the sign."
  - Otherwise, the Bible narratives become "just so" stories. People read Rudyard Kipling, and the stories end: "And that is why the leopard has its spots." And that is why the tiger has stripes. And that is why the sky is blue.

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<sup>3</sup> It is called the "new" covenant by Luke (Luk 22:20) and the author of Hebrews (Heb 12:24), meaning the final administration of the covenant.

- They come to the Bible and say, “And that is where a rainbow comes from.” No. God takes something that is already there, a part of their lives, and infuses it with meaning.
  - It is the way that God engages the culture.
4. He did the same thing with Abraham:<sup>4</sup>
    - Circumcision was generally practiced by nations at large, as a rite of passage, as a sign of introduction into manhood.
    - But now this was different. But then God said to Abraham, in **Gen 17:11** “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.”
    - He took a sign, a bloody sign, and said, now it will signify inclusion in the covenant community and the need for cleansing.
  5. Jesus is now doing the same thing with bread and the cup. He was taking the most regular of things in their lives, and saying God will be present with you now more than ever before. The covenant has reached its final form now. And when you celebrate that by eating and drinking in remembrance of me, there will be grace in this sign, in which you and I will commune.
  6. I will be so close in this sign that it will be like you will be eating me and drinking me.

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<sup>4</sup> And David, using the sign of the throne Psa 89:3, Psa 132:11-12.

#### **D. Moses and the sign of Passover: the bloodiness is over**

1. But remember, a covenant is a bond *in blood*. There has got to be blood involved. There is a cost to God coming this close, because the original covenant was broken. All of God's covenant work through history was a fight to get us back to Him.
2. That is why many of the previous signs so often had to do with blood:
  - Gen 3:21 The skins of clothing He made for Adam and Eve.
  - The bloody circumcision He instituted for Abraham.
  - And the Passover, the sign of the Mosaic administration of the covenant.
3. Now, on this Passover night, Jesus reclines with his disciples. It is this special moment with them,
  - And Jesus repeats the words of Moses in Exo 24:8 –“Behold, the blood of the covenant.” Except for one difference. Jesus says, behold, *my* blood...
  - Moses said it and then sprinkled the people with actual blood.
  - Jesus is saying, now just use bread and wine. Because my own death will seal the covenant.
4. You see, what He is saying is, the bloodiness in the signs is over. Because I myself will supply the blood. Because I will sacrifice myself for you tomorrow. Now, you just need bread and wine. Through the simplest of things in your life I will commune with you. That is how close I will be.

### III. The Promise of the Bond to Come

Finally, to really enter into communion this morning, I want to show you how Jesus is not just saying something about the past. He was saying something about the future.

#### A. An Unfinished Passover Liturgy

1. The meal they were eating was the main Passover meal,<sup>5</sup> Nisan 14<sup>th</sup>.
2. The Passover Liturgy of 1st Century AD came from Exo 6:6-7. They would read each of these promises and then take a cup of wine:
  - 1) I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians
  - 2) I will rid you of their bondage
  - 3) I will redeem you.
  - 4) I will take you for my people and I will be your God...
3. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with the third cup.<sup>6</sup>
4. Which means, in **v25**, when Jesus says, "I won't drink this cup again," Jesus is pledging not to drink the 4<sup>th</sup> cup until the Kingdom comes in fullness. He refuses to drink the last cup.
5. Which means that the Last Supper is an uncompleted meal. He will finish the meal together with us when the fourth promise is entirely fulfilled:
  - "I will take you for my people and I will be your God..."
6. Not drinking it "with us" is the important part. In fact, that is the way Matthew translates the emphasis of Jesus' Aramaic words into Greek<sup>7</sup> (Mat 26:29): I won't drink it again until I drink it "with you."

#### B. His promise to us

1. This is a promise to us:
  - "I want to promise you something. I'm going away, but I'll be back.
  - And in that time when you feel like I've deserted you, I want you to remember this cup. I want you to remember that I haven't finished the meal with you yet.
  - I am not off some place enjoying myself. I am off preparing a room for you in My Father's house.
  - But I won't celebrate until you're with me. I won't rejoice. I won't enjoy that last cup until your problems are over.

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<sup>5</sup> For reconciliation with the account of John's gospel, see my notes, "Passion narrative: The Last Supper was..." in *Bible: Alleged Discrepancies*.

<sup>6</sup> Daube, *NT and Rabbinic Judaism*, (London, 1956), 330ff. argues that "Cup of blessing" (Mar 14:23, 24, 25) is technical term for the 3<sup>rd</sup> cup. Jesus spoke these words of institution during the third cup. So Paul uses that term in 1Co 10:16 to describe the Lord's Supper. Edersheim agrees.

<sup>7</sup> The differences in phrasings in Mark 14:22-24; Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:17-20;,, probably arise from the different translations out of the Aramaic that Jesus spoke.

- I will not let the sweet fruit of the vine touch my lips until I have brought you to myself, until I have brought about the restoration of all things, that brings you to rest with me.”
2. What is He saying? “My happiness is tied up with yours.” Please hear Him speak through these words to you. You think that you are alone in the pain of what you are going through? No. Jesus your Lord is refusing wine because of the difficulty in your life right now. He is saying, “No, how can I relax and celebrate when a member of my beloved bride is in pain. I won’t do it.”
  3. Again, **in v25**, He adds one of His emphatic “Truly I say unto you...” prefatories. I think the reason we see these throughout the gospels is because this is what the disciples made sure to remember. Whenever He said, “Truly I say unto you...” they took notes.
  4. This is the travesty of the Da Vinci Code. This is the great tragic lie of the suggestion that Jesus married Mary Magdelene, the cost of its selling out of sound history for the conspiracy impulse. He never took a bride so that He could love you as a bride. He never married so He could bring about a great marriage, being solely devoted to you.
  5. “I will not drink it until we are together again. And all has been made well.”

### **C. Communion puts an assurance in your life**

1. What is the problem that is bothering you? Communion lets you face it because in it you receive Christ’s love letter. It says: See what I’ve done for you in pouring out my life for you? You can know that I will come and finish the meal with you. So it is O.K. His love conquers all.
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2. And in that real love and dedication, we commune with Him. You can actually feel it. We share bread and wine to impart the reality of the blessing which we are in the midst of receiving but have not yet fully received.
3. This Passover meal is unfinished. It is still laid out for us to eat. That is why we do it every Sunday here at the Village Church. We lay out this table, and carefully choose the Table cloth, to keep it freshly laid no matter what the season of the year. That is why we carefully re-enact the ceremony of the liturgy, to convey that promise that He made to us: that He is coming back for us.

