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."

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, all adult Jews were bound to come to Jerusalem with sacrifice animals to observe the annual event of the Passover. Perhaps many 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. Still others were those who hoped that Jesus would establish the Messianic kingdom on earth, including his disciples. In fact, it was a time of testing for the people of God, and it was a time of intense spiritual struggling for Jesus. 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). What a surprise! This woman came and disturbed the all-male dinner party by pouring perfume on Jesus’ head, crying at his feet and wiping his feet with her hair. 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). Politically speaking, what they said seems to be laudable. But their error was that they were blinded by their self-righteousness to the woman’s crying out for God’s mercy. Moreover, they did not see the sacrificial character of a woman. They only saw the beautiful alabaster jar being broken, and drops of expensive perfume spilling from Jesus’ head to his shoulders and to the floor. They rebuked her harshly, bitterly regretting the waste of such an expensive commodity through the woman’s senseless and extravagant action.

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 the fragrant act of a soul set free from sin. 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. Most likely, this woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. In the past, Mary had been ruled by her physical desires. When her brother died, she bitterly accused Jesus of coming too late. But Jesus did not blame her for speaking her mind or for her past. Jesus wept for her until she could see the glory of God when her brother Lazarus came walking out of the tomb. Now, she came to Jesus as she was and asked his mercy for her unbelief and bitter heart 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. Jesus rejoiced that her precious, wandering soul had come home to God.

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 did not see this woman’s act as a random act of kindness. 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.” Jesus deliberately connected this woman’s seemingly rash and extravagant act with his own death on the cross. It is a reminder throughout all history that Jesus’ death was the most extravagant act of love ever known. For God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, spilling his blood on the ground to save sinners from their sins.
Fourth, Judas was a selfish person (10,11). Look at verses 10,11. Mark juxtaposes 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's Inferno 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."

Jesus instructed two of his disciples to go into the city and make preparations to eat the passover secretly in a large upper room of a believer, thought by many to be Mark’s mother. They went, and made preparations there. That evening, Jesus arrived with the Twelve.

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 they said to him, "Surely not I!" Judas’ betrayal caused everyone to tremble before his own sinful desires. They too were afraid for Jesus and for themselves, and thought "Maybe it’s I!"

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. To stand by Jesus in
the face of suffering and hardship seems too difficult. But the price of betrayal is more than we can bear.

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? Simply speaking, the blood of the covenant is what makes the covenant between two parties binding. At Mt. Sinai under Moses’ leadership, the Israelites had made a blood covenant to serve God only and obey his commands, and they would receive the promised land. God indeed led his people into Canaan and gave them a land flowing with milk and honey. But the Israelites failed to observe this covenant. Why? It was because of the power of sin. Because of sin, the Israelites could not remember God’s grace to them in bringing them up out of slavery in Egypt to their beautiful new homes. Instead, because of sin, they only wanted to enjoy flowing milk and honey and forget all about their covenant obligation to serve God as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They only envied other godless nations, saying that God’s grace to them was not enough. The blood of the old covenant was from the sacrificial lambs that were slaughtered by the priests. The blood of the lambs had no power to hold the Israelites to their word. The blood of the lambs had no power to free God’s people from the power of sin.
But Jesus’ blood is different. 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 is the Son of God. But Jesus came to this world to die on the cross and pour out his holy blood to cleanse our sins. Jesus’ holy blood was not poured out once for a few. Jesus’ blood was poured out once for many. Through Jesus’ blood, the covenant between God and his people is ever new, giving God’s people final victory over the power of sin and death. One famous pastor was recently discovered to have had an illicit affair, and then to have used church funds to support her and her daughter from him. What does it mean? What is the testimony of St. Paul? Romans 7:21-25 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? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This is the reason God had to shed his Son’s blood to save men from the torment of sin and death. Men are faithless. Even the best deserve condemnation. But Jesus’ holy blood is stronger than man’s desire to sin. Jesus’ holy blood opens the way for sinful men to come back to God.

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. 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. 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.