

As you can see before me, we will be partaking in the Lord's Supper this morning.

I read a story about a little girl who attended "big church" for the very first time on a Sunday morning when the congregation was taking part in the Lord's Supper. When the elements were served, the little girl was overheard saying to her mother in a loud whisper, "The snack we get in Children's Church is much better, and we get a lot more juice."

I bet snacks were better in Children's Church, but with that said, obviously, the little girl doesn't understand the significance of the Lord's Supper because she wasn't taught about it. Now, you have been taught about it, but this morning, it's my intent to go deeper into the Lord's Supper than you may be familiar with, and to begin, I need to take you back to where it all started – to its roots – to Egypt.

As you might remember, when Joseph – the son of Jacob, was the number two man in all of Egypt, the Jews left the Promised Land because of a severe drought and they moved to Egypt. Under the care and protection of Joseph, they flourished, but Joseph would later die and eventually, the Jews would become the slaves of Pharaoh. For 400 years, the Jews longed to return to the Promised Land – but they couldn't. They were held in bitter bondage, until – when the time was right, God raised up Moses to deliver His message to Pharaoh saying: ***"Let My people go!"***

Well, as you know, Pharaoh wouldn't listen, and God used the hardness of Pharaoh's heart to reveal to everyone that the God of Moses was the one true God amongst a land full of false gods. So, God began to bring plagues upon the Egyptians, but Pharaoh still would not budge.

Then, at last, there came the judgment of the first born – the tenth plague, the last plague in God's rescue plan to deliver His people, and in anticipation of this last plague – a plague that would prompt a quick exodus from Egypt, the Jews were told to prepare and this is what they did.

On the 10th day of this first month of the Hebrew calendar – that would be the 10th of Nissan, each Jewish household was to find and take an unblemished male lamb – a year old, and that lamb was to live with the family for four days until the 14th day of the month – the 14th day of Nissan. In this way, the lamb became part of the family so to speak, and by the time it was killed on the 14th – it was cherished and also mourned by the family.

After the lamb was killed at sunset, God told Moses to instruct the people, “*Take the blood of the lamb and spread the blood on the top and on the sides of the doorway of their houses.*” **Why**, because God was sending the Angel of Death to the land of Egypt that very night, and whenever the angel saw the blood of the lamb applied to the doorway – because those in the house believed God’s Word and obeyed His command, the angel would skip over that household and there would be no death. God’s judgment would pass over them – but when there was no blood applied to the doorway due to the failure of those in the house to trust and obey God – rest assured, death would visit that home.

Now, God also gave the Jews instructions about eating during this special event. On the 14th, after the blood of the lamb was applied to the doorway, the lamb was to be roasted and eaten that same night, and anything left over was to be burned in fire. They were also to eat bitter herbs to symbolize their bondage and slavery, and they were to eat unleavened bread because they would not have enough time to make bread the normal way – using yeast and letting the dough rise. That would take too much time for they would have to leave Egypt in haste.

Well, just as God promised, the Angel of Death passed over Egypt, and the land was filled with the bodies of the first-born and the first born of the herds and flocks. It must have been a devastating and gut-wrenching experience, and in response to this 10th and final plague, Pharaoh let the Jews go.

So, they packed up in haste and begin their Exodus back to the Promised Land with the command by God to observe the Passover celebration each and every year as a continual reminder of their deliverance by God from their bondage and slavery in Egypt.

That’s the background, so now let’s fast forward some 1400 years to Jerusalem where thousands upon thousands – maybe as many as two million devout Jews from all over the world have gathered together in the holy city for the annual Passover celebration. It’s a massive event, and it’s also very relevant event, for once again the Jews find themselves under the thumb of a foreign empire – not the Egyptians – but this time – the Romans.

Now, if you recall, Jesus and His disciples were in the area for the celebration, and the disciples asked Jesus where they would be eating the Passover meal because preparation was necessary – and if you remember, Jesus told Peter and John to go on ahead into Jerusalem to look for a man carrying a picture of water, which would really stand out because that was a job typically reserved for women in that culture.

Well, sure enough, just as Jesus said, Peter and John find a man carrying a picture of water, and that man leads them to a large furnished upper room where Peter and John get busy making preparations to eat the Passover meal by obtaining an approved lamb, having it slain by the priests at the temple, and then roasting it for the meal. They would also get the bitter herbs, a sauce made from a stewed fruit and nut mixture, unleavened bread, and red wine typically diluted with water. That seems like a lot of stuff for two men to do without a woman coming to their rescue, but the Passover meal could only be eaten between sunset and midnight, so Peter and John had some time to get things ready.

In the Gospels, we are told that when it was evening, Jesus came with His disciples to the upper room to partake of the Passover meal, and it's here that I need to walk you through what was involved in this special meal – this last Passover meal observed by Jesus – and I will try to do so by using various portions from the Gospels as well as referring to Jewish sources.

According to ancient Jewish oral law which was later written down, there is an order – a sequence of steps to be observed when partaking the Passover meal. Now, as I was preparing for this message, in my studies I found a few variations from Jewish sources in how this meal was to be observed, but with that said, I think I found enough common ground to capture the essence of it.

The Passover meal, which is also called a “*Seder*,” begins with a blessing for the meal – similar to a blessing we might give before eating, but when this blessing is given, it's done while the head of the house holds a cup of wine – the first of four cups of red wine which coincide with four promises related to the Passover given by God to His people in Egypt. They are found in **Exodus 6:6-7** and they read,

“Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgment. ⁷Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.’”

In this passage there are four promises made by God, and to symbolize these promises, there are four cups of red wine, and this first cup of wine is called the “*Cup of Sanctification*.” Sanctification means to be “*set apart*” and this first cup is given this name because God promised His people, “**I will bring you out.**”

After the blessing and the drinking of the first cup, there is the ritual washing of hands symbolizing the need for spiritual cleansing and holiness, and it also serves a practical purpose because, as you know, they ate with their hands.

So, in a Jewish household, at this point in the meal, they would take a vegetable like lettuce or a potato and dip it in salt water – salt water representing the tears shed during their bondage, and according to passages found in Exodus and in Deuteronomy, a child would then ask, “*Why do we do this?*” and that would prompt the head of the household to tell the Passover story. Now, I am not aware of any children being in the upper room, but I suspect Jesus would have told the story and explained its meaning to His disciples, they would sing from the Psalms – likely from **Psalm 113** and **114**, and then they would drink from the second cup of wine called the “*Cup of Deliverance*” for God said to His people “**I will deliver you from their bondage**” – from the bondage of the Egyptians.

With the second cup of wine consumed, we come to unleavened bread on the table, and we need to talk about the bread for a moment. In a Jewish household, there would be three sheets of unleavened bread provided for the Passover meal, kept in a cloth bag with three compartments which keeps the sheets together, and yet at the same time separated.

Traditionally, for the Sabbath and other festivals, only two sheets of bread are used as a reminder of the double portion of manna the Jews gathered before their day of rest in the desert – but for the Passover meal, a third sheet of bread is added, and for a Jew these three sheets of bread could be symbolic of any number of things. For example, for some, it represents the three cakes that Sarah baked for Abraham when he was showing hospitality to three angelic visitors. For others, it might represent the three categories of Jews that make up the Jewish people. It could also represent the three patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, there are various views by the Jews as to the symbolism of these three sheets of bread.

Now, according to Jewish tradition, and this is interesting, the middle sheet of bread is to be removed from the bag and broken in two. One half is shared at the table, while the other half is wrapped in a napkin and hidden somewhere in the room – only to be found later and brought back to the table at the end of the meal to be shared like a dessert.

Obviously, with that bit of information, from a Christian perspective, we might conclude that the three sheets of bread represent the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with the middle sheet of bread that is broken representing the body of Jesus.

I can totally see that connection from a Christian perspective; however, this is a Jewish meal, and they likely saw it differently.

So, at this point in the meal, the middle sheet of bread is removed from the bag and broken, and half of it is shared at the table. With the bread in hand, they will fold bitter herbs into it like a sandwich, and then dip it into the bowl containing the stewed fruit sauce – and I think it’s right here, and I could be wrong, that Jesus becomes troubled and reveals He will be betrayed.

In **Matthew 26**, beginning with **verse 21**, we are told,

“Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.” ²²**Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, “Surely not I, Lord?”** ²³**And He answered, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. ²⁴The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”** ²⁵**And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?”** Jesus said to him, **“You have said it yourself.”**

Have you ever enjoyed a family meal then something is said the ruins the moment? That’s what happens here. They are reclining at the table, when Jesus says, **“One of you will betray Me.”** The disciples have heard many surprising things from Jesus, but certainly this one had to take the cake, and each disciple went to Jesus to ask if he was the betrayer. Jesus knew it was Judas, but Jesus did not publicly single him out, and the disciples didn’t suspect Judas either because he was the treasurer of the group – the one you should trust the most.

All Jesus would say publicly was it was one of the twelve **who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl.**

There are a couple of things I want to point out here before we move on. This is one of those paradoxes in the Bible, because it reveals the sovereignty of God and also the freewill of man at the same time. Judas, like any rejecter of Christ, acts on his own motives, acts on his own choices, acts by his own will. Judas operates from his own greed and his own selfishness, and he betrays Jesus. Yet everything Judas does is fit by God into His plan so that Judas plays a crucial role in the death of Christ – just as God designs. Judas will never be able to make the claim to God that he was simply fulfilling prophecy. Judas was not driven by God to betray Jesus – he chose to do so, and yet, God simply used that choice for His divine purpose.

There is another important point to make here before we go on. Don't make the mistake in believing that Jesus did not love Judas. Jesus loved Judas just as much as He loved the others – but Judas rejected God's love, and He did not recognize Jesus as the Lord. If you noticed in our passage, when the disciples questioned Jesus about the betrayal, after searching their own hearts, each one asked Him, **“Surely not I, Lord?”** but when Judas asked his question, it was **“Surely it is not I, Rabbi?”**. Even then, Judas only recognized Jesus as a Teacher – not as the Lord.

Now, according to the Gospel of **John, Chapter 13**, Judas leaves the upper room to get his money and to tell the religious leaders where they could find Jesus in the garden later that evening. So, only the eleven remain and Jesus continues with the Passover meal.

And it's time for the main course – the roasted lamb. Jesus would have distributed portions of the lamb to His disciples along with the other sheets of unleavened bread, and when main course was finished – it's time for dessert and that brings us to **Mark 14**, beginning with **verse 22** – and I need to set this up.

In a Jewish household, after the lamb had been eaten – the portion of bread which had been hidden, or maybe Jesus just set it aside, is brought back to the table. A blessing is given by the head of the household, the bread is broken, and then it's shared – followed by the third cup of wine. It's here that Jesus adds a whole new dimension to the meal – it becomes something new and different – it becomes what we call the *“Lord's Supper.”*

So, let's pick up at **verse 22**.

²² While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is My body.” ²³ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ And He said to them, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

We are told that Jesus takes the bread, He breaks it, and shares it with His disciples. Jesus tells them, this bread represents **My body**. He then takes the cup of wine – this is the third cup called the *“Cup of Redemption”* or the *“Cup of Blessing”* and it's this cup that Jesus uses for the Lord's Supper.

It's interesting that this cup coincides with the third promise God made to His people found in the last portion of **Exodus 6:6** which says,

“I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgment.”

Did you get the mental picture I got?

This *Cup of Redemption*, which represents the **blood** of Jesus, is poured out for the redemption of many, with outstretched arms on a cross, so that God's great judgment would fall upon His Son and pass over those who place their faith in Him.

A family was casually driving around sightseeing on their vacation. It was a warm, clear, summer day and they were enjoying the breeze coming through the rolled down windows. Soon the peaceful drive was interrupted when a bee flew through the open windows and buzzed around the car. A young girl, who was allergic to bee stings, squirmed and shrieked as the bee flew close to her. She called out, “Daddy, Daddy! It's a bee! It's going to sting me!”

The father quickly pulled the car over and began trying to get the bee out of the car. Unable to do so, and not wanting to anger the bee into accidentally stinging his daughter, he cornered the bee against the windshield. Having the bee trapped, he grasped the bee in his hand and waited for the inevitable sting. Feeling the sharp pain of the sting, he opened his hand and released the bee out the window. The little girl began panicking again, “Daddy, it's going to fly back here again and sting me!”

The father gently responded, “No honey, he can't sting you now. Look at my hand.” In his hand was the bee's stinger.

The God who acted in history to deliver His people from Egypt has also acted in history to deliver you and me from the sting of spiritual death and eternal separation from God. The bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper are powerful symbols that cause us to remember that Jesus really did suffer and die for you and for me.

The Lord's Supper is all about remembrance, and if you notice, Jesus only gives the bread and the wine to remember Him by. Bitter herbs are not taken in the Lord's Supper because Christ has removed the bitterness of the bondage of sin. Likewise, we do not serve lamb at this table because Jesus fulfilled that role. Jesus

was the spotless Lamb of God – the Lamb that God had sent to serve as the once and for all substitute. He took our place.

We are also told in **verse 26** they sang one last hymn, which according to Jewish tradition was probably **Psalms 118** – then they walked to the Mount of Olives, to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Now Pastor, you mentioned there were four cups of wine. **Did they drink the fourth cup?** There is a lot of speculation about that, but after drinking the third cup of wine, Jesus then said this in **Matthew 26:29**,

“But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.”

So, there is a fourth cup of wine called the “*Cup of Restoration*” or the “*Cup of Presence*” for God said in **Exodus 6:7**,

“Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God.”

It is this last cup that speaks of the Lord’s return – it speaks of the time when the Lord’s earthly kingdom is fully restored – and it is then that Jesus said He will drink from the cup with His people. In essence, Jesus has turned this fourth cup into a pledge, and as a believer, it prompts us to look forward to this last cup at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

So, the Lord’s Supper looks backwards to the past, remembering the finished work of Jesus, but it also causes us to look forward in joy and hope when we will sit down with Him to share that fourth cup – the *Cup of Restoration* – the *Cup of His Presence*.

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