



COMMUNION & RECEIVING

(Inside)

You've spent some time around the fire pit, receiving or remembering the forgiveness of Christ, identifying with Peter, and the Peter-like strategies you've employed to try and run your life, that only ruin your life.

And you've spent a few moments considering the artifacts and idolatries that made Good Friday so wicked and brutal. The last artifact you collected from the table was a stone. A stone that represents the idols of your own heart that have been, or are, a hindrance to your own true worship and whole-life devotion to Jesus Christ. The next thing we will do together is celebrate Communion, and as you make your way back into the sanctuary, I would like to ask that you place that stone at the foot of the large cross inside. Not only does the Christian come to the place of laying their whole lives at the foot of the cross, but that is also the place where every competing idol, and love, and fantasy, and self-loving strategy comes to die. At the foot of the cross where True Love laid down his life, everything else crumbles.

You may choose to wait outside for another moment or two, or you may choose to make your way back inside, but as you do, let me set the stage for you, and remind you what we celebrate as we eat the Lord's Supper together.

When Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples, he was the host. Traditionally there were different, scripted things said and shared during the meal, to commemorate how God "passed over" the Israelites, spared them from destruction, and freed them from 400 years of slavery in Egypt through the Exodus. At each point in the meal, the host leads the family or group in a toast. Mark, the gospel writer, recounts what happened when Jesus lifted the third cup: **Mark 14:22-25** - *²² While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. ²⁵ "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

Imagine how much of a shock it must have been for the disciples when Jesus, explaining the symbolism of the meal's elements, decides to part from the script that their Jewish ancestors have been reenacting for centuries. He takes the bread and says, "This is my body." What does that mean? Jesus is saying, *"This is the bread of my affliction, and my suffering, because that will bring about the ultimate exodus and the ultimate deliverance from slavery."*

In ancient times, when someone said something like, "I'm not going to eat or drink until I _____ (fill in the blank)," that was a way of making an oath. To make this kind of a statement meant that you were making a covenant – a solemn obligation – between you and another

party. It would be to us like signing a contract. But these sorts of covenants were set and sealed by killing an animal. You would kill the animal, cut it in half, and then walk between the pieces of the animal. Sometimes people would have the blood of the animal sprinkled on them as they made the promise. It sounds downright gruesome to us, but it was a visible way of saying, "Look, if I don't hold up my end of the bargain or fulfill my promise, then may I be cut in half like this animal, may my blood be spilled." That's a promise you'll remember, and keep.

Look again at what Jesus said when he took the cup during the Passover dinner: ²³ *Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.* ²⁴ *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.* ²⁵ *"Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

What Jesus is communicating to the disciples is that as a result of his coming substitutionary (in-your-place) sacrifice there is now a **NEW COVENANT** between us and God. The basis of this restored relationship is Jesus' own blood; "*my blood of the covenant.*" When he says he won't eat or drink until he's with us in the Kingdom of God, he is promising that he is absolutely committed to us – he's pledging to bring us safely into the Father's arms; to bring us to the ultimate feast of the King in heaven.

These are simple gestures – holding up the bread and the wine. And they are simple words, "*this is my body...this is my blood.*" But with these simple things Jesus is saying that all the earlier deliverances God provided for his people, all the previous sacrifices, and all the other lambs sacrificed at Passover – they were all pointing to him. The first Passover was observed the night before God saved the Israelites from his justice through the blood of a lamb. This Passover meal, too, was eaten the night before God redeemed the world from sin and death through the blood of Jesus, lamb of God.

Jesus was the main course. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin and the prophet that preceded his ministry; when he first saw Jesus, he said, "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (**John 1:29**). And Isaiah, the prophet writes this about Jesus, the Messiah: *The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...He was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter...he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors* (**Isaiah 53:6-7, 12**).

In Mark's gospel, when Jesus says, "*This is my body...This is my blood...poured out,*" he means: "*I'm the One that Isaiah and John spoke about. I am THE lamb of God to which all other lambs pointed, the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.*" On the cross, **Jesus got what we deserved**, all the guilt, sin, brokenness of the whole world – it fell on him. He took God's divine justice for our sin so that we could be passed over – he is our Passover lamb.

We talk a lot about *love* in our culture, but what you've got to know is that all true love, all real life-changing love, is **substitutionary sacrifice**. Jesus was about to show his disciples, and the whole world, that kind of love. That's what we remember when we take communion – the Lord's Supper.