

Blood. Wine. And Gospel.

~ MARK 14:23–24 ~

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As we prepare to come to the Lord's Table on this final Lord's Day of 2025, I want us to linger over the words of Jesus in **Mark 14:23–24** as He speaks of "*the new covenant*." Gathered there around the table with His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion, He took a cup of wine and passed it around for everyone at the table to drink. And then, referring to this cup of wine, He said, "*This is My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many*." We're going to close out this year by looking at the biblical story of **blood & wine** and see how these two symbols point to the **gospel** of our salvation. Blood. Wine. And Gospel.

the STORY of BLOOD

I have a scar on my right hand from where I ripped my hand open as I was falling out of a tree when I was 5 years old. Seeing the blood on my hand, I thought for sure that this is how my story ended. It's because of scenes like this that we associate blood with **wounds**, with **pain**, with **death**. We see blood, and we think "*bad*." But Jesus turns this association on its head when He instituted the Lord's Supper. He gives them this image of blood and connects it to something infinitely "*good*." Jesus was about to shed His blood so that they might have His life – forever. As this symbol of blood was passed around the table, it was given as a picture of death leading to life. As Jesus gives them this symbol of blood, they are not meant to think "*bad*." They are meant to think "*glory*." *Salvation. Grace. Gospel*. When we see this portrayal of blood, we are not meant to think, "*Oh no!*" We are meant to think, "*Thank you, Jesus*."

We get a similar picture of blood being poured out so that others might live every time we **donate blood**. Blood is taken from one so that another might live. This is what Jesus is doing on this night, except His blood is not for their *temporal* life but for their eternal life.

See, every single one of us in this room is going to live forever; the question is *where?* in the glory of the presence of the One who created you or in everlasting darkness separated from God and from all that is good? Now, you can choose to *ignore* this reality. You can choose to *disbelieve* it. You can choose to see it at just *religious church jargon*. You can *put it off* for when you're closer to your deathbed (*as if you had any control over when that day comes*). But the truth remains the same regardless of what you do with it. There is coming a day when your mortal body will die, and you will stand in the presence of your Maker and King. In that moment, you will either hear, "*Welcome into the joy of your Master*" or "*Depart from Me; I never knew you*."

Here in the Upper Room, as Jesus institutes the Lord's Table, He is about to sacrifice His life *for us* so that we might live in the presence of the glory of God forever, and **the picture** of this sacrificial death leading to newness of life is blood.

Now, this isn't the first time that the people of God have been given a picture like this. In the Exodus, when God rescued His people from slavery in Egypt, He gave them this picture of sacrificial death leading to salvific life by having them sacrifice a spotless lamb and wipe the blood over the doorposts of their homes.¹ So, during the final plague in Egypt, as the angel of death passed through the land to take the life of every firstborn son, he would see the blood on the doorpost and know that death had already come to that house – and he would pass over. The life of the son was saved because another innocent life had been sacrificed in his place. And the sign of this death-for-life was blood. The blood didn't just mean death, it meant life. It didn't just mean that a life had been *sacrificed in death*; it meant that a life had been *saved from death*. It was a picture of death and life.

Throughout the Old Testament, this is always the symbol God uses as He seals covenant promises to His people: *sacrificial blood* of an animal. We see it with Adam in the Garden of Eden.² We see it after the flood when God

¹ Exod 12:1–13.

² Gen 3:21.

makes a re-creation covenant with Noah,³ and then again when God makes His covenant with Abraham,⁴ and then again when He makes His covenant with Moses.⁵ We see it when priests are consecrated.⁶ We see it on the annual Day of Atonement.⁷ We see it constantly in the daily sacrifice that took place in the Tabernacle (*and then later in the Temple in Jerusalem*).⁸ The story of the OT is a story written in blood. Why? Because **blood is the substance of life**,⁹ and every page of Scripture is telling the story of the coming day when the Son of God would come to shed His blood so that we might drink of His life forever.¹⁰

And, in His divine wisdom and sovereign purposes, **the symbol that God chose** to represent the sacrificial blood of His Son for our everlasting life **is wine**. Just as God uses *blood* to tell His story throughout the Bible, so He also uses *wine* to tell His story throughout the Bible. If this sounds familiar to some of you, it's because we looked at this story of wine together in our sermon on "*The Cup of Blessing*" back in May 2023. In His divine sovereignty, God ordained that wine tell the story of the gospel.

the STORY of WINE

- **It tells the story of divine victory.** The very first time God delivered His chosen people in a battle over the enemy, Melchizedek (*the first priest in the Bible*) brings out bread **and wine** to celebrate the victory (**Gen 14:18**).¹¹ The gospel is a story of divine victory, and wine was the first-ever God-given means of celebrating victory over the enemy.
- **It tells the story of divine blessing.** When Isaac prayed his great fatherly blessing over his son Jacob, he asked God to give Jacob an abundance of grain **and wine**. Similarly, the final blessing from the lips of Moses was that God's people would dwell "*in a land of grain and new wine*" (**Deut 33:28**).
- **It tells the story of divine gladness.** In **Psalm 4:7**, David compared the gladness that God puts in our heart to the kind of gladness we have when grain **and wine** increase. Again, in **Psalm 104:15** the psalmist says that God is the one who gives **wine** that makes the heart glad.
- **It tells the story of heaven.** In Isaiah, God promises a day when all people will dine with Him in a feast that includes **the best aged wine** (**Isa 25:6**).¹² The prophet Jeremiah speaks of the day when people will stream to the goodness of the Lord where there is wheat **and wine** and where sorrow is gone forever (**Jer 31:12**).¹³
- **It tells the story of our worship in the presence of God.** Along with the sacrifice of a lamb, God's people were to offer **wine** as a daily offering to the Lord (**Exod 29:40**).¹⁴ And then, every year, they were to offer God a tithe of their grain **and wine** (**Deut 14:22–23**). They would travel to the place that God had chosen, and then they would eat bread **and drink wine** in His presence. It was called an offering of rejoicing (**Deut 14:26**).
- **And it tells the story of Christ's sacrificial death, His victorious resurrection, and our new life in Him.** When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, it was during the Jewish Passover celebration when they used four cups of wine to tell the story of their rescue from Egypt. In **1 Cor 10:16**, the apostle Paul tells us that the cup Jesus used to portray His blood was the "*Cup of Blessing*" – which most biblical scholars believe was the 3rd

³ Gen 8:20–22.

⁴ Gen 15:9–21.

⁵ Exod 24:3–8.

⁶ Exod 29; Lev 8.

⁷ Lev 16.

⁸ Exod 29:38–42; Num 28:1–8.

⁹ Lev 17:11, "*The life of the flesh is in the blood.*"

¹⁰ Heb 9:22.

¹¹ When God's people sing over the destruction of the enemy, they sing "*A vineyard of red wine!*" (Isa 27:2). The salvation of the Lord leads to grain and new wine (Zech 9:16–17; Amos 9:14).

¹² See also Joel 2:19; 3:18; Amos 9:13; Luke 22:18.

¹³ See also Prov 31:6–7. Wine has the ability to take the edge off of sorrow temporarily. In heaven, it will be gone for good.

¹⁴ See also Deut 23:13; Num 15:5, 7, 10; 28:14; Deut 14:23, 26; 1 Chr 9:29; 2 Chr 31:5; Neh 10:39.

cup of the Jewish Passover, also called the *Cup of Redemption*. The cup that Jesus gave His followers to commemorate the gospel was a cup of wine.

Biologically, the process of grapes becoming wine is wonderfully significant...

- **First**, the grapes must be pressed and crushed. The skin is torn, and the juice is poured out.
- **Second**, the juice must be left to die (*that is, it must lose what it naturally is*). Yeast must be allowed to enter the juice and consume the sugars. The sugars must be broken down and consumed. Thus, the life of the grape is not preserved; it is given up. In juice, the life of the grape is preserved (*the sugar is not consumed*); in wine, it is put to death.
- **Third**, as the sugars die, they are transformed into a new kind of life through the process of fermentation. In other words, the juice is not *improved*; it's changed. It's not what it once was. What emerges is something stronger, deeper, weightier, and incomparably more powerful.
- **Fourth**, before the wine is brought to the table, it must rest for a time in darkness and sealed containers. Juice requires no resting time, but after wine has undergone the process of death through fermentation (*which takes place in the open*), it is then sealed in darkness before being consumed.
- **Finally**, when the wine is finally consumed, it has the ability to reach the heart and the mind in a way that juice never could.

When Jesus instituted “*the cup*” at the Lord’s Table, He was giving His followers something that already has the gospel embedded within its very essence: it tells the story of bloody violence, death, and new life. It’s not the same as juice. Yes, they are both the fruit of the vine, and they both share the same basic dark red color, but they tell two different stories:

- The essence of one (*grape juice*) is **safe & tame**; the essence of the other (*wine*) is **powerful and dangerous**.

This reminds me of the famous line from C.S. Lewis’s book, “*The Chronicles of Narnia*” where Aslan is the lion that is meant to portray Christ. There is this moment where one of the creatures in Narnia is talking about Aslan to a girl who is nervous about meeting a lion. “*Is he quite safe?*” she asks. Here’s the answer that she was given by a creature who knew him well. “*Safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.*”

When it comes to the Lord’s Table, one cup is safe and tame, and one is not!

- One can be **consumed casually**; the other one must be **received rightly**.

Wine has always had the potential to lead to a lot of harm in a person’s life. There are numerous places where the Bible speaks about the abuse of wine.¹⁵ Overindulgence leads to all kinds of sinful behaviors, and drunkenness is always a sin. Period. No exceptions. I often hear professing Christians speak very casually about being drunk, but God’s Word does not. **To be intoxicated is to glory in the gift over the Giver.** Scripture consistently speaks of wine as a good gift that can be abused, but this is true for any of God’s good gifts:

- *Physical intimacy is a gift; adultery is a sin. Food is a gift; gluttony is a sin.*
- *Wealth is a gift; greed is a sin. Knowledge is a gift; pride is a sin.*
- *Fire brings warmth, and it brings destruction. Hammers build up, and they can tear down.*

Wine has the power to *delight* and the power to *destroy*. Thus, it **must** be received rightly.

- One impacts the **senses**; the other impacts **the heart and mind**.

¹⁵ We see evidence of its **abuse** all over the Bible (e.g., Gen 9:20–27; 19:30–38; Isa 28:7–8; Pro 20:1; 23:29–35; 31:4–5; Isa 5:11–12; Amos 6:4–6; Luke 21:34; Rom 13:13; Gal 5:19–21; Eph 5:18) and all throughout human history – even in our own community. We even see it being abused by the local church in Corinth when it was supposed to be used for the Lord’s Table (1 Cor 11:21–22).

While juice impacts our physical senses (taste, smell, sight), wine goes deeper. It goes beyond the senses. The psalmist, in his song of “*praise to the sovereign Lord*,” writes that wine “*makes glad the heart of man*” (Ps 104:15). Wine has the ability to reach into our heart, and in the context of worship, this is expressed as a good thing.

- One tells the story of **life being preserved from death**; the other one tells the story of **death leading to life**.

The substance of juice remains unchanged from the vine to the cup, but when wine finally makes it into the cup, it is no longer what it once was. It is irrevocably changed. One **remains** what it always was; the other **becomes something new** – which is the story of the gospel. “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (2 Cor 5:17). The gospel is the story of our dying with Christ and being raised to walk in newness of life with Him (Rom 6:1–4).

One is safe; the other one has the power to take over your heart and mind.¹⁶ In His wisdom and sovereignty, God does **not** choose that which is safe to tell the story of His sacrificial death. He does **not** use what is tame to tell the story of heart-transforming joy that comes from knowing the gospel. He uses the one that has power. Nothing that God does is arbitrary or whimsical; there is a divine purpose for everything that He ordains.

There’s a reason we use **BREAD** at the Lord’s Table – *and not Dorito chips or beef jerky* – because God ordained that bread tell His story from Genesis to Golgatha. And there’s a reason that, for the first 1800 years of church history, the church used **WINE** at the Lord’s Table – *and not tea or coffee* – because God ordained that wine tell His story from Genesis to Golgatha. Broadly speaking, grape juice was not part of the Lord’s Table until the Temperance Movement in the late-1800’s and early 1900’s. Some really significant things were taking place during that time in history (*particularly in the West*) that steered the church away from practices that it had always held. **For example...**

- **Up until the mid-1900’s**, virtually every Christian church on the planet practiced female head coverings in worship. Something changed in the middle of the twentieth century, and it wasn’t the Bible. *And now, very few churches in the global West practice head coverings.*
- **Up until the mid-1900’s**, virtually every Christian church on the planet believed that the public preaching ministry was reserved for men who were biblically qualified and called by the church. *Now, we have female pastors and preachers in many, many churches and denominations.* Something changed in the middle of the twentieth century, and it wasn’t the Bible.
- **Up until the 1900’s**, virtually every Christian church on the planet used wine at the Lord’s Table. But, as the world was changing in the 19th and 20th centuries (*particularly in the U.S. and Britain*), alcohol began to be seen as something contrary to Christianity. In the late 1800’s, along comes a Methodist by the name of Thomas Welch who developed “a method” of pasteurizing grape juice – which prevented it from fermenting. And his family marketed **Welch’s Grape Juice** specifically for communion. *And now, for the past century, the vast majority of churches would sooner condemn wine than serve it at the Lord’s Table.* But it wasn’t always this way! Something changed, and it wasn’t the Bible.

I bring all this up simply to note that sometimes the church is *steered by the culture instead of by the Word of God*. With all of my heart, I don’t want our church to be *steered* by cultural standards; I want us to be the light of the world that *sets* the cultural standards. This is part of what happens when we are faithful in discipling the nations with the Word of God. When we “*make disciples of all the nations*” (Matt 28:19–20), the Word of God does not *cater* to the culture, it *creates* the culture. The disciples were accused of turning the world upside down because entire societies were being steered by the Word.¹⁷ I long for us to be a church that is steered by the Word of God in all that we do – including how we celebrate the Lord’s Table. And when we surrender our opinions and our preferences and our fears to the Word of God, by the grace of God, we begin to see details and connections that we’ve never noticed before. You see so much more when you submit yourself under the Word of God than you ever do when you stand

¹⁶ Pro 23:29–35 (the emphasis is on “*those who linger long*”); Eph 5:18 (the emphasis is on those who are “*drunk*” with wine).

¹⁷ Acts 17:6.

over the Word of God. And one of these wonderful connections is the role of blood and wine in the story of the Bible and in the ministry of Jesus.

the Ministry of JESUS

Jesus **began** His earthly ministry by creating wine for a wedding celebration (**John 2:10**). This was His entrance, His front door, His “going public” moment – miraculously providing over 120 gallons of the best wine for the celebration of a holy union. And He **concluded** His earthly ministry by giving His followers wine to drink in remembrance of Him (**Mark 14: 23–24**). And then throughout His ministry, wine was often embedded into the kingdom stories that He told.¹⁸ Why? *Maybe because Jesus came* so that our hearts might taste heaven’s joy – *and wine is the symbol of joy*. *Maybe because Jesus came* so that we might be blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places – *and wine is the symbol of blessing*. *Maybe because Jesus came* so that we might celebrate our victory over sin & death & hell & Satan & shame & addiction – *and wine is the symbol of victory*. Jesus came so that our old life might die with Him and be raised to new life with Him – *and wine tells this gospel story*.

So, now what?

Application

1. **A word to our young people** || You have heard me say that wine is a good gift from God, for so it is. But you have also heard me say that wine is powerful and dangerous and easily abused and that drunkenness is a sin. So, my pastoral word to you is that you would honor God with your heart and mind by refraining from consuming alcohol on your own, not only until you are not only legally allowed to, but until you are spiritually and biologically mature enough to worship God with every sip. There is a reason that our country allows 18-year-olds to drive cars, shoot guns, and fight in wars, but we don’t allow them to purchase alcohol. There is a unique kind of power in alcohol that will easily destroy your life if you consume it on your own before your heart, soul, mind, and body are mature enough to handle it rightly.
2. **A word about the Lord’s Table** || If you attended our annual meeting earlier this month, then you know that the elders feel that it is right for us as a church to begin serving both wine and grape juice during the Lord’s Table, beginning next Sunday – the first Sunday of the year. While this might feel like something very new, it’s actually something very old – as old as Mark 14. It might feel like we are being steered by the culture around us, when, in fact, we are simply going back to a practice that was embedded within Christianity for over 1800 years of church history.
3. **A word to individual consciences** || We know that there are some in our church who are conscientiously opposed to alcohol, and our desire is not cause you to sin against your conscience.¹⁹ The Bible gives us space to worship according to our conscience,²⁰ and so we are going to serve both wine and grape juice during the service. And my pastoral admonition to each of us is that we would honor God and love one another by giving space for our brothers and sisters to worship God according to their conscience. Some will do this by taking the wine, and some will do this by taking the grape juice – and neither one makes a person more or less holy or accepted in the eyes of God. Symbols matter, but the reality is infinitely more important. So, whether we use grape juice as the symbol of Christ’s blood shed for us or whether we use wine as the symbol of sacrificial death and new life, **Christ is what matters** here. For the sake of the glory of God, the reputation of Christ, and the unity of the church, let us love one another – even as our consciences differ on this issue.
4. **A word to parents with children in the home** || The Bible gives us spheres of authority, and *you* are the God-given authority over your children (*not the government, not the church*). So, in this regard, the decision of how your children will participate in the Lord’s Table is up to you. Legally, children are allowed to take wine as part of an official religious worship service if they have permission from their parents. Regardless of whether you have them partake of the wine or not, this is a great opportunity of teaching them what it

¹⁸ Mark 2:22 (new wine and old wineskins); Matt 22 & 25 (wedding feast parables); Mark 14:23–25 (new covenant). And, according to the biting accusations of Jesus’ enemies, it appears that wine was a regular part of many of the meals that Jesus shared with people during His ministry (**Matt 11:19**).

¹⁹ Rom 14:22–23; 1 Cor 8:9–12.

²⁰ Rom 14:4–6; Gal 5:1; Col 2:16–17, 20–23.

looks like to love and honor *people* more than your *preferences* and to live by biblical conviction rather than by the expectations of others.

5. **A word regarding the method** || For the sake of wisdom and transparency, there will be methods in place to ensure that children never have access to the wine before or after the service. Everything that is done with the wine will be handled by our adult leaders and recorded by our security cameras. The only time our congregation will have access to the wine is when the elements are passed during the service.
6. **A word for the New Year** || While the *topic* of this sermon has centered around wine, the *heartbeat* of the message is that we might be a people who **celebrate** our **new life** in Christ. That we would be a people who **rejoice** to know that we are destined for an eternity in the presence of the glory of our God because our sin was put to death on the cross with our Savior, and then after three days in sealed darkness, as our Savior stormed out of the grave, we too will be raised to new and everlasting life in Him.²¹ This is my prayer for North Center in 2026 that we would be a people marked by gospel **joy**, a people who are **satisfied** in God, a people who live in the **victory** of Christ over sin and addiction and shame and fear, a people who live to **worship** in the presence of our God.

BENEDICTION

*“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine...without money and without price...
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.”*
~ *Isaiah 55:1–2*

²¹ Rom 6:4–5; Eph 2:4–6; Col 2:12; 3:1.