



Mark 14:1-26
Jesus, Our Passover Lamb

Summary: Why do Christians celebrate communion? Because it reminds us of God's promise to Passover our sins if we're under the blood of the Lamb.

Here at City Gates, we celebrate communion on the first Sunday of the month. You probably know it represents the body and blood of Jesus. But do you know that when we eat this small cracker and drink from this tiny plastic cup, we're continuing a tradition that is over 3000 years old? Do you know that Christian communion is anchored in the Jewish Passover? We'll explore that connection this morning along with the symbology of what it all means and what it is meant to do.

But first, we'll spend some time understanding the condition of the world where Jesus lived which will help us understand why we needed something like Passover, and then communion, in the first place. Read with me:

Mark 14:1 After two days it was the Passover and *the Feast of Unleavened Bread*. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put *Him* to death. 2 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people."

1. The world was, and is, broken.

I need you to notice two things here – *who* is involved and *what* they're doing. Religious leaders in Israel are scheming to arrest Jesus **by trickery** – they're planning a covert, stealth mission because they don't want to start a riot. To me, this is a classic case of group think – you know when everyone sitting at the table starts to talk themselves into an objectively bad idea. And then someone comes in from the outside and asks, '*What* are you all thinking?' It's immediately evident to anyone outside the group that they've become so fixated on one thing that they're making bad choices.

Well, again, these are supposed to be the religious leaders of the nation. How did they get to the point where deception and destruction were considered not just valid, but primary, options?

When you look at the news today it's easy to think the world has gone mad. It's easy to think this is surely the worst it's ever been. But the truth is, things have always been bad. There has never been a time since the dawn of Creation when everything was great and wonderful – a time when there were no catastrophes, oppression, friction, and suffering *and there will never be*.

Every culture, every country, every family since the dawn of time has experienced struggle and pain. The Bible says it's because the whole world is infected by sin. All these things that go wrong can be traced back to the fact that we, individually and collectively, turn our backs on God in big and little ways.

But, while we turn away from God, He reaches down to us. That's what Jesus came to do. In fact, look at what's He's doing now, *while people conspire against Him*.

3 And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured *it* on His head.

Where is Jesus as people plot and scheme against Him? He's at the house of a leper.

Leprosy was a contagious disease, a double-death sentence – it killed you physically and socially. If you were diagnosed with leprosy, you were immediately forced out of your family and community to 'stop the spread.' There was no cure. There was no recovery. If you were diagnosed with leprosy, you would spend the remainder of your life alone or with other lepers.

But here is Jesus sitting *at the table of a leper*. No doubt someone He healed, and whose life He completely restored. Jesus takes people that are falling apart and makes them whole again. He gives them another chance. And then He spends time with them – this is what you see over and over again in the Scriptures – Jesus heals someone, then He spends time with them. He establishes relationship.

So now, as they sit there celebrating the inconceivable, something surprising happens. A woman comes and pours expensive perfume on Jesus. But notice the reaction:

4 But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.

A denarius is what most people earned for a day of work. So, this bottle of perfume was worth what most people would make in a year. It may have been her dowry.

Now, put yourself in her place and see all what's happening from her perspective. She was a human being just like you and me - this is history, not fiction - she's not just a character in some story. And that means she had to work through what she was doing. The idea came into her mind: "you should go and get the oil and anoint Him with it."

And then there was this inner dialogue – the same one you and I experience. Wait. What!?! Really? Where is this coming from? God, is that you?

Well, the Bible tells us in **Phil 2:13** “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” The Holy Spirit is active in our lives, He brings ideas and desires to us and we either receive them or reject them. So, at this moment, God was at work giving her this idea and she was wrestling with it. You know what it’s like because we’ve all had similar experiences going back and forth as we debate in our mind. You think:

- Yes, that’s a great idea.
- Wait, really? Lord, is this from You?
- OK, I’ll do it.
- Um, do I have to do it now? With everyone watching? Can’t it wait until later?
- No, I really feel like I have to do this right now.
- OK, I’ll do it!

So she does. She does what she feels like she needs to do for Jesus, for God. And what happens? She’s immediately, publicly, criticized. How must that make her feel? What’s the inner dialogue like then? ‘You idiot. What were you thinking? Let’s get out of here.’

I’m drawing our attention to this for the same reason I drew our attention to the priests – to help you see that the world is still basically the same place and we’re basically the same people. Some of you know exactly what this woman felt because you’ve been there. You did, or you’re doing, something for God and other people criticize or question you.

Really? You’re going to church again? You’re doing a Bible Study? You’re going to give that to the church? Aren’t you getting a little carried away? Aren’t you being a little fanatical? Isn’t this enough?

Christian, I need you to see this same line of thought has been around for thousands of years. We could go back even further to King David dancing before the ark of the covenant as they finally brought it back to Jerusalem from years in captivity and isolation. David’s wife told him, you’re being undignified in the way you celebrate. And David said, you don’t understand what and Who I’m celebrating. I’ll be even more undignified than this.

Christians, true love is not cold and calculating, ensuring we give enough but no more – it is always a little reckless, a little extravagant, a little extra.

And notice how Jesus comes to her defense:

6 But Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. **7** For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. **8** She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. **9** Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”

Christian, I need you to know that the same God who defends this woman for what she has done sees what you're doing and defends you too. He keeps records and there will be a reward – you are storing your treasure in heaven where moth and rust cannot destroy and thieves cannot break in and steal. Your service to God is eternal and appreciated.

You also need to know – it's not the size, quantity, or value of what you give to God – whether it's your time, money, or your service. God always looks first at what's in the heart of the giver, not what's in their hands. Church, it's not about what you do or how much you give, it's about *why* you do it.

Yes, Jesus is pleased with her extravagant gift – a gift equal to an entire year's wages. But there was another woman Jesus was pleased with recently, we saw her back in chapter 12 at the Temple - it was a widow who gave two mites, two pennies.

In purely financial terms, the widow's gift was nothing to compared to the offering of this woman. But both pleased Jesus. Both were commended by Jesus. In God's spiritual economy, both mites and millions have similar value if given by a surrendered heart.

It's an absolute contrast of motive with what happens next:

10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. 11 And when they heard *it*, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.

The woman's act of dedication and consecration is sandwiched between two acts of betrayal. You remember the first point I wanted to make this morning is to highlight the condition of the world at the time – to help us see that this is the world Jesus lived in, it's the same world we live in today. A world where people misuse their authority and power for selfish objectives. A world where the things we do for God are misunderstood and criticized. A world where friends betray and backstab without provocation.

What did Jesus ever do to Judas? The only real answer is that He disappointed him. Judas was guilty of the same sin that plagues each of us: he didn't like what God was doing, he wanted to be in control, he wanted to make all the decisions and do things his own way.

This is the way the world was, my friends. This is the way the world is. This is why there was a Passover.

Mark 14:12 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover *lamb*, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?"

13 And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. 14 Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may

eat the Passover with My disciples?"' 15 Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished *and* prepared; there make ready for us."

16 So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.

2. Passover is salvation

The Jews had been celebrating Passover for more than thirteen hundred years at this point. Something like the American idea of Thanksgiving, it was an annual celebration to remember that God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and established them as an independent nation in the Promised Land.

There are two points there worth emphasizing – they celebrated what God had done for them – what He had saved them from, *and* what He had given to them instead.

Imagine you're in tremendous debt, you owe more than you can ever hope to earn in this lifetime. You're never going to pay it off, you're just going to pass it on to your children and they have little hope of ever paying it off either.

But then imagine someone comes along and for whatever reason, they offer to pay the debt off for you. Now you owe nothing. But you've spent your entire life trying to make payments, so you owe nothing, but you have nothing as well. You're at zero. It's not bad compared to where you were. But what if, in addition to paying off your tremendous debt, they also gave you a large sum of money?

Now your life is doubly transformed. You don't have debt, and you do have capital. You can set up a new life.

That's what God did for the Jews when He led them out of slavery in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And that's what He does for us when we enter His kingdom through repentance and faith in Christ. He forgives our spiritual debts, gives us spiritual gifts, and produces spiritual fruit in us. He takes us from spiritual bankruptcy to spiritual flourishing when we surrender and follow.

Passover was the defining moment of that transformation for the Jews. They had been in slavery in Egypt for generations when God raised up Moses to tell Pharaoh to set them free. Pharaoh knew exactly what God wanted, exactly what He said, but Pharaoh resisted and denied God's demand.

So, many of you know the story, God sent nine different plagues on the land to authenticate the message. God says let the Jews go. And Pharaoh kept saying no. So, finally, God said this is it – you cannot rebel forever without consequence. The tenth and final plague will result in the death of the first born of every family in Egypt because you will not let My people go.

But, God told the Jews, and the Egyptians, you can escape this plague if you sacrifice a lamb and take it's blood and mark the frame of your door with it. Then gather your family, roast that lamb, and eat it as your evening meal. If, when the angel of death comes through to execute judgment, blood has already been shed, then the angel will pass over that house and lives will be spared.

Don't miss this church – a life was required in judgment for rebellion, but it didn't have to be yours, there could be a sacrificial substitute. Tim Keller put it like this: "In every home that night there would be a dead child or a dead lamb. When justice came down, it either fell on you and your family or you took shelter under the substitute, under the blood of the lamb."¹

There are many things we could say about the Passover and its symbolism, but I've only got time to highlight three quickly.



First, this is the Hebrew word *chai*. It's very common to find as a pendant on necklaces. It means 'life' or 'alive.' If you know Fiddler on the Roof you may remember the song where they drink *I'chaim* 'to life!'

Here's what I see every time I see this word – a branch of hyssop on the side, dipped in blood that has been brushed across the top of the door and down the sides. A symbol of the truth of the Passover: that everyone inside escaped death by faith and found life.

Second, Passover was a community event. It affected everyone, but it was celebrated together. Every family was supposed to slaughter its own lamb and eat the meal, but if you didn't have a family, or if your family was small, you were supposed to participate with others. You still had a personal part, you had to come in by your own faith, out of your own belief and desire to participate, but it was in community with others.

Third, Passover wasn't about how strong your faith was, or how good or bad you had been up to this point, it wasn't even about how much you understood what was happening – you were not saved by any of those things. You were saved by simply trusting God, agreeing with what He said, and going along with it. You were saved by simple, obedient faith. And those who chose to do their own thing suffered their own fate.

Again, much like Thanksgiving, this historical event became an annual feast that every Jewish family would celebrate each spring and which Jesus transformed into communion for Christians.

We have seen how broken the world was, and what Passover meant, now point number three:

¹ Tim Keller, *Jesus the King*, 178-179.

3. Jesus is our Passover Lamb.

Jesus gathers with His disciples to celebrate Passover– the annual feast where everyone remembers that God delivered His people from slavery and led them to the Promised Land, He paid off their debts and gave them riches, because they received, by faith, the promise of escape through the blood of a lamb – they trusted God instead of demanding their own way.

Mark 14:17 In the evening He came with the twelve. **18** Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me.”
19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, “*Is it I?*” And another *said, “Is it I?”*

It’s always been fascinating to me that they didn’t immediately suspect Judas. What does that tell you? That just like we saw with the priests and scribes it’s possible to be very busy with religion and spirituality on the outside, and even seem convincing to others, but be bankrupt and empty within. Remember what we said about the Temple last week – looks can be deceiving, God judges by what’s inside.

20 He answered and said to them, “*It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish.*” **21** The Son of Man indeed goes 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 never been born.”
22 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”
23 Then He took the cup, and when He had 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 new covenant, which is shed for many. **25** Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”
26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Friends, Jesus is sure of two things – that He will suffer, and that His kingdom will come. He tells the disciples, ‘I am the new Passover lamb. I will give my life. My blood will be spilled and you will be saved, if you receive this meal by faith. Moses led the Jews to the Promised Land, I will lead you to My Father’s house in the Kingdom of Heaven.’

And so, today, when we receive communion, a small piece of broken, gluten-free, cracker, and a tiny plastic cup of juice – it reminds us of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. It reminds us that God will pour out His vengeance on those who resist Him their whole life like Pharaoh, but He offers a path of mercy and forgiveness who those who will receive it as well.

Not because they’ve gotten their life together. Not because they understand everything about God and His ways and what substitutionary penal atonement or propitiation mean. But because they say, by faith, God is right and I’ve been wrong. I want to trust Him.

It's not like medicine though. If you take medicine, it doesn't matter if you understand what it is or how it works, it's going to work. Medication will affect you because you put it into your body. Communion is not like that. There is no magic in the cracker or the cup. They are activated by faith.

So, ask yourself today – do I really repent of my sins, do I really regret resisting God? Do I really need salvation?

Do I really desire a new life and freedom – do I want to be set free? Do I want my debts to be paid and to receive gifts from God to use as I live this new life?

Do I put my trust in God's mercy, alone, to save me?

And, am I thankful for what I receive?

Because here's one profound difference between the original Passover and its fulfilment in Christ. If you celebrate without Jesus, you have to provide your own lamb. You have to buy one with your own money or take one from your own flocks. But now God says 'Here, I'll send you Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.'

Today, you don't even have to provide your own lamb. It's all being given to you, it's all being offered to you. But still, you must accept, you must choose, you must receive.

Do you?

At some point everyone who desires to be forgiven, set free, and saved must come to God and say, 'I need Your help. I can't save myself. I can't fix myself. I've messed up. I've hurt others and I've been hurt. Will You forgive me? Will you let Jesus be the lamb that was slain for me, and will You let me come into Your house, share in this meal, and let death and judgment pass me by? I want to be led by You and helped by You from this day forward.'

There must be a day when you say something like to God for the first time. You'll find yourself repeating it often, just like the Jews celebrated Passover annually and the Church celebrates communion monthly, you might have a conversation like this with God daily. But it has to happen the first time, and then you're saved.

There's only one Lamb, and He only died once. Everything after all that is a memorial, a remembrance, and we do it, as often as we do, in remembrance of Him.

So, take some time now and pray – pray that prayer for the first time if you've never prayed it before. Confess your sins and receive new life. Or, reflect and remember – seek Him again and thank Him again, consecrate this year, and your life, to living in the spiritual Promised Land now that God has delivered you from Egypt.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Mark 14:1-26

Jesus, Our Passover Lamb

Summary: Why do Christians celebrate communion? Because it reminds us of God's promise to Passover our sins if we're under the blood of the Lamb.

- What's the most extravagant gift you've ever received, or given, or seen given or received?
- This woman did something unique for Jesus. What are some different ways or things we can give to God?
- Have you ever felt judged for the gifts you make to, or the life you live for, God? What have you learned or how have you handled it?
- Why is it important to know that both mites and millions are valuable to God, if they're given by a surrendered heart?
 - o What other examples can you think of in Scripture where God took something small and made much of it (cf. 1 Kings 17:8-16; John 6:9-14)?
 - o What other examples can you think of where people gave God large gifts (cf. Acts 4:32-37; Phil 4:15-20)?
 - o What examples can you think of where giving went terribly wrong (cf. Acts 5:1-11)?
- Read Exodus 12:1-14 to understand the details of the first Passover. What stands out as significant to you? What links do you see between the first Passover and Jesus our eternal Passover Lamb?
- What questions have you had about communion, or what questions have you answered for people?
 - o Do you remember the first time you received communion? Or have there been any particularly meaningful times?
 - o What about communion means the most to you?
 - o What is the difference between communion taken by faith and medicine?