

# Communion with Jesus

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Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, I do enjoy reading the obituaries in the newspaper. Sounds strange. Please don't think I'm odd, at least not more odd than you thought I was already. But it's not because of some kind of morbid fascination with death that I read the obituaries.

In fact, it's the opposite. It's because I want to see how people have lived their lives, how they have impacted the world and what they have achieved. Because what I discover when I read obituaries, and if you do too, it is all about the person's life.

And there is little or next to nothing about the person's death. All the emphasis, all the focus is on how they have lived. And it's the same with biographies.

It is all about somebody's life with very little or no mention of their death. And now the reason I say this is because in the accounts of Jesus's life, the Gospels, and we're looking at Mark's Gospel just now, in the Gospels, there is so much focus on his death.

And so in the Gospel of Mark, it goes into great detail about the death of Jesus. The last few chapters are all focused on his death. And it is the dominating factor.

[ 1 : 0 9 ] But also throughout the Gospel of Mark, Jesus frequently and explicitly mentions that his death is coming. He knew that he would die.

And so the question is, well, why? Why all this focus? Why all this attention on Jesus's death? And it is because we won't understand Christianity if we don't understand why Jesus died or what his death means.

Because his death is absolutely central to the Christian faith. And yet so many people fail to see the significance of Jesus's death. I guess if we walked out the road, Great Western Road, and we asked people, why did Jesus die or what does Jesus' death mean?

Probably none or very few would be able to give the biblical reason for why Jesus died. Because for many people, Jesus is seen as just a good example, as a nice moral teacher who met his tragic end by dying on a cross.

And yet what the Gospels do, what the Bible does, is teach us a full understanding of why Jesus died, what his death means.

[ 2 : 1 8 ] Because we do need to know what his death means because the sheer magnitude of the claims of what the death of Jesus achieves means we can't simply ignore what is a central event in human history.

And so that's what we're going to consider this afternoon. Because Jesus doesn't just talk about the reality of his death here in this passage. He also explains the meaning of it. And we see this in this reading about the Last Supper.

So I'd like us to look at it under three headings. The first is the preparation of Jesus's death, verse 12 to 21. Secondly, the explanation of Jesus's death, 22 to 26.

And then finally, the application of Jesus's death. Preparation, explanation, and application. So first of all, the preparation of Jesus's death. Jesus, you see, knew that he was going to die.

He'd already predicted his death on numerous occasions. And so what we need to grasp is that Jesus was in control of his death. Nobody's in control of their death.

[ 3 : 22 ] We might think that we are, but only Jesus was in control of his death. He is never caught up in circumstances that are beyond his control. He is never a helpless victim.

Every move he makes, every step he takes throughout the gospel of Mark is towards his death. It is preparation for him dying.

In fact, you may have noticed that the word for prepare comes up three times in verse 12 to verse 16. So let's read verse 12. On the first day of the festival 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?

Now, the Passover was and also is for the Jews the most important festival of the Jewish calendar. But this isn't just preparation for the Passover here.

This is preparation for the death of Jesus. So what is the Passover? Well, the Passover in the Bible, in the Old Testament, it commemorates Israel's exodus from Egypt.

[ 4 : 29 ] And so it is a defining moment in Israel's history when God rescued his people from their slavery. So God sent terrible plagues on the Egyptians, forcing Pharaoh to free his people.

And then the final and the worst plague of all was the plague on the firstborn. Because God had told the Israelites to kill a lamb and paint its blood on their doorposts.

And so the Passover remembers the night when the angel of death passed over all the firstborn of the Israelites, God's people, while killing all the firstborn of the Egyptians.

And so the lamb was sacrificed as a substitute so that the people could be saved. And so this was celebrated every year.

The sacrificing of a lamb would take place. The family would gather. They would have a meal together. And every year, the menu was essentially the same. Lamb, the main course, followed by other things.

[ 5 : 33 ] I guess it's a bit like Christmas dinner for us. What's the main part of a Christmas dinner? It's the turkey. There's all the other trimmings, Brussels sprouts, Christmas pudding, and so on. But it's about the turkey.

And so Jesus chooses this most important night in the Jewish calendar to have the Last Supper with his disciples. And it was all deliberate because we see how the Passover actually explains the meaning of Jesus' death.

So Jesus is in total control. Just look at this as we read verse 13 to 16. So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, Go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you.

Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, The teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready.

Make preparations for a stair. The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. So the preparations are meticulously executed just as Jesus says.

[ 6 : 44 ] The two men go, they meet a man carrying a jar. Apparently this was unusual because it was the woman who normally carried the water jars, while the men carried the wineskins.

And so when they read twelve, twelve, he replied, One who dips bread into the bowl with me. He's telling his disciples one of them would betray him.

They're shocked, they're saddened. But Jesus doesn't name and shame Judas, but only that he would be the one who dips bread into the bowl with him.

And so on the table they would have a common dish which they would share. And it's this small detail that simply highlights the shocking nature of the betrayal by Judas.

Because sharing a meal with anyone in that context was a sign of friendship and a sign of trust as you sat together around a table. And yet Judas was ready to betray Jesus and have him killed.

[ 7 : 43 ] But while Judas was acting against Jesus, he was actually acting in line with the mission of Jesus. Because this was all preparation for his death.

As verse 21 says, 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.

So Jesus knew it would be this way because the scriptures said so. And so as Jesus moves towards his death, what he's doing is he is submitting to his Father's will.

That's why his death is no tragic accident. And verse 21 actually gives us the perfect balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

So both are at work here in the death of Jesus because Jesus is fulfilling God's purposes by going towards his death, while at the same time he is betrayed by Judas who chooses to do it.

[ 8 : 47 ] And so you can see that God's sovereignty never cancels out human responsibility. Judas is still responsible for his decision to betray Jesus.

And yet it was all part of God's plan. And so that's the first thing we need to understand about the death of Jesus. That through everything, Jesus was in control of his death.

And so let's consider then secondly what his death means. So there's the preparation of Jesus' death. Secondly, there's the explanation of Jesus' death. Verse 22 to 26.

Jesus takes the Passover and he uses it as they celebrate it together to explain the meaning of his death. So it's worth understanding just what went on during the Passover meal.

As we said earlier, the Passover remembers God's rescue of his people from their slavery in Egypt. But the actual meal had a specific format that never ever changed.

[ 9 : 50 ] And there are a number of different elements to this meal. And so it would be conducted by the father of the household. And on the menu was roasted lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and wine.

And there was a traditional pattern that was always followed. And so when the food was brought in, one of the children would ask a question along the lines of, Why do we eat these foods on this night?

And then the father would reply by telling the story of how God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. And so the bitter herbs that were part of the meal, they would recall the bitterness of the life of slavery that God's people had.

The unleavened bread was a reminder of how God swiftly delivered them from Egypt because they had to escape in such haste. There was no time to bake bread.

So it was unleavened bread without yeast. And then the roast lamb was the main course of the meal. It was the center of the celebration. And it was a reminder of how the lamb's blood was smeared on the door frames so the angel of death would pass over their homes.

[ 10 : 59 ] So the lamb was sacrificed as a substitute so that the people could be saved. And then the meal was punctuated with the singing of Psalms 113 to 118.

That's why we sang Psalm 113 earlier. These were the Hallel Psalms, and they would come at different points in the meal. And also the wine. There were four different cups of wine that would be drunk at certain stages of the meal, and certain things would be said.

Now, it's interesting. Mark doesn't include all of this detail here. We simply get the highlights. And I think we get the highlights because Jesus was going to put a new spin on the Passover meal.

Jesus was using it to explain his death. And so he takes Israel's most special tradition, and he reconstructs it around himself and his mission, the reason why he came to this world.

So just see what he says, verse 22 to 24. 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.

[ 12 : 07 ] This is my body. Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, he said to them.

So Jesus takes these two elements of the Passover meal, the bread and the wine, and he uses them to explain how his death would be the means of rescue for his people.

So he's saying, ultimately, the Passover points to me. It is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. And so just as the lamb was sacrificed, and its blood was shed for the sin of the people in the Passover, so Jesus is saying, This is my body.

This is my blood, blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. And so if we rewind back to the Passover, when it was first instituted, after God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, God then made a covenant with them on a mountain, Mount Sinai.

And it's there back in Exodus chapter 24. So God gave his people commandments for them to obey, and they agreed to obey everything that God had said.

[ 13 : 24 ] And so Moses then sacrificed some young bulls, and he confirmed this covenant, this agreement between God and the people, by sprinkling blood on the people. You can imagine the mess it must have been.

But it was a reminder that the people were in covenant relationship with God. The covenant was sealed with blood, and sealed in blood. So the covenant, in a sense, bound the nation of Israel to God as his people.

And so if we fast forward back to this night, the Last Supper with Jesus and his disciples, Jesus picks up on the words of Moses, when Moses speaks of blood of the covenant.

But now Jesus is instituting a new covenant. Well, it was promised in the Old Testament by the prophet Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 31, because Jesus is forming a new Israel around himself.

But the new covenant wasn't sealed by the blood of animals. It would be sealed by the blood of Jesus, poured out as he died on the cross.

[ 14 : 31 ] And so Jesus is alluding here to so much of the Old Testament. He's speaking of Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant, Isaiah chapter 53, where we read of the servant of the Lord who poured out his life unto death, and the servant of the Lord who bore the sin of many.

So Jesus is claiming to be this suffering servant, because he was about to pour out his life to death for the sin of many. Jesus is about to die like the Passover lamb.

His blood would be shed so that people could be saved and rescued. And so do you notice how in this account of the Last Supper, there's no mention of the lamb here, which remember is the main part of the celebration.

There's bread, verse 22. There's wine, verse 23. But there's no lamb. I guess it's like sitting down to Christmas dinner and there being no turkey. People would be asking, where's the turkey?

What are we here for? It would be odd, because the turkey is the main course. And so it sounds odd that there's no reference here to the lamb. Mark makes no mention of it in his gospel, and neither, interestingly, neither do any of the other gospel writers.

[ 15 : 51 ] And why is this? It's because Jesus is the Passover lamb. There's no lamb on the table because the lamb is at the table with his disciples.

Jesus is the main course, if you like. He even says as much. Verse 22, this is my body. Verse 24, this is my blood.

Jesus is the lamb about to be sacrificed. And so the Passover and the Exodus is like a foreshadowing of the salvation that Jesus would give to his people.

And that's why the Last Supper, with all of the imagery and the symbolism, really explains to us what the death of Jesus means. I don't know if you've ever read Harry Potter, but you'll know that J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series is about a young wizard who's called Harry, and Harry was orphaned as a baby.

And then when he's at Hogwarts School, the headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, he tells Harry that his parents died, protecting him from the evil Voldemort.

[ 16 : 58 ] And when this happened, Harry was left with a scar on his forehead in the shape of a lightning bolt. And so Dumbledore explains to Harry in the first book, his mother died.

Her loving sacrifice meant that he could be saved. And this is what Dumbledore says. He says, your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love.

He didn't realize that love, as powerful as your mother's for you, leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign. To have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever.

It's Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, if you're interested. Dumbledore tells Harry how his mother's loving, substitutionary sacrifice saved him and protected him.

And the scar on his forehead was a constant reminder to Harry of his mother's love and protection for him. Now, of course, Harry Potter is fiction, but can you see how the Last Supper is this tangible reminder for us?

[ 18 : 06 ] It's a sign for us of what Jesus did through his loving, substitutionary sacrifice for us. It's through his death on the cross that we are protected.

He's the one who was scarred in our place, so we need never be. And so just as the Passover lamb was killed and its blood was painted on the doorpost so that the Israelites could be saved and then enter into a covenant with God, so too Jesus' blood would be shed on a cross to save many and bring them into covenant relationship with God.

So Jesus' death would bring about a new Passover and a new Exodus and a new covenant. Alec Mateer, who's one of my favorite Old Testament scholars, he says this in his book, Loving the Old Testament.

It's amazing. He says, Can you see whether Old Testament or New Testament, God's plan of salvation is essentially the same.

It's described in different ways, but it is how God saves his people through substitutionary sacrifice. And so Jesus here in the Last Supper was indicating how he would come and his death would be a substitutionary sacrifice to save people.

[ 19 : 44 ] So that's the preparation of Jesus' death, the explanation of Jesus' death. So let's thirdly and finally think about the application of Jesus' death. Because the Last Supper is used to explain what Jesus' death means.

Jesus is the perfect Passover lamb and it's through his substitutionary sacrifice that God's judgment can pass over us because it fell on Jesus when he died on the cross.

And we all need salvation from the wrath of God. Our sin brings wrath from which we must be saved. And yet Jesus loved us so much that he willingly took God's wrath on himself when he died on the cross so that we need never have to face it.

And so it is only then through the death of Jesus, the perfect Passover lamb, that our sin can be forgiven and we can receive God's salvation.

So his body was broken so we could be made whole. His blood was poured out so we can be washed clean. And that's why we must apply Jesus' death to us personally.

[ 21 : 00 ] In other words, we must take what Jesus offers. Because did you notice there's a clear invitation here at the Last Supper? Verse 22, Jesus doesn't just say, this is my body.

What does he say? He says, take it. This is my body. And he doesn't just say, this is my blood. Verse 24, he says, this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.

So his body was broken and his blood was shed to offer salvation freely to everyone who puts their faith in him. And so we then must respond to this gracious invitation of Jesus by receiving what he offers.

because if we are going to benefit from the death of Jesus on the cross, we must take what he gives. And taking the bread and taking the wine symbolizes receiving Jesus as our Savior.

Let me try and illustrate. Just say you're invited round to a friend's house for a meal. They say, come round to the house on this date, this time, and we'll have a meal. And so on the day of the meal, they've gone to the supermarket to get some food.

[ 22 : 15 ] Even better if they go to the butcher to get some food. And then they've chosen the best ingredients and they spend a lot of time and they cook you the very best meal. And it's all ready for when you arrive.

And so when you arrive, they sit you down at the table in front of this amazing meal that they have prepared. It's right in front of you, so what do you do? Well, it's no good just looking at it.

You've got to eat it, haven't you? If you're going to benefit from that meal, you've got to take it. If they've gone to all this effort to prepare it for you, it would be a massive insult to say, nah, no thanks.

Don't really fancy that. Don't want it. And yet, Jesus' death demands a response from us. And still so many people say, nah, no thanks.

It's not really for me. And so think of your guest again who invites you for the meal. It isn't just a massive insult to say, no thanks, I don't need this.

[ 23 : 24 ] I think that would be the end of the friendship to say, I don't want this. But when it comes to God, how much bigger a mistake is it? How far more insulting is it to say to God, no thanks, I don't need this.

Because all the preparation for the death of Jesus, all the explanation of the death of Jesus here in Mark, but also all through the Bible, to then believe that Jesus' death has no application whatsoever for me is the biggest mistake anyone could ever make.

And yet, that is what many people do. They don't think they need the death of Jesus to save them from the wrath of God. And they don't think that the judgment that is coming towards us that is stopped by Jesus as He died to take that judgment so that we could avoid it.

They don't think that God will actually judge. And yet, there is no way that God's judgment will pass over us if we have rejected the one way of salvation that God offers to us, which is to take Jesus as our Savior.

Because when we take Him as our Savior, His once-for-all sacrifice on the cross is applied to us. And so we share in all the blessings of His death.

[ 24 : 48 ] And so we're able to enjoy communion with Jesus. And that's why the Lord's Supper is so important for us to celebrate together as a church. We did it last Sunday. Because it reminds us to look in three directions, to look back and to look around and to look forwards, to look back.

So, in the Last Supper, which is now the Lord's Supper, we look back with gratitude for all that Jesus has done for us. The Lord's Supper points us back to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for my sin.

And so when we eat the bread and when we drink the cup, we remember that His body was broken and His blood was shed for me so that I could be saved and put right with God.

So we look back and we look around. The Lord's Supper reminds us that we look around with love to our new family. So the Passover was a family celebration and so is the Lord's Supper.

And we're supposed to share it with our brothers and sisters in Christ because Jesus has established a new family through His death. And so when we are united to Christ by faith, then we're united to one another as His family, the church.

[ 26 : 10 ] So we look back, we look around, and then we look forward. We look forward to our future with Jesus because Jesus explains the significance of the Last Supper for the future.

Look at verse 25. He says, 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's Jesus saying? He's saying His life would end soon and He wouldn't be drinking the fruit of the vine again. He wouldn't be drinking wine again until He drinks it new in the kingdom of God.

So there's a sense in which the Last Supper is an unfinished meal because it's pointing us forwards to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. And that's when Jesus will drink with His people again.

Because when we are united to Christ, well, we enjoy communion with Him now, but it lasts forever. And so when we celebrate the Lord's Supper in church, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

[ 27 : 14 ] Because when He comes, we anticipate this even sweeter communion with Jesus than we can ever have in this life. Because that's when we'll drink with Him at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in God's perfected kingdom that will come in the future.

And so participation in the Lord's Supper right now is a very small and yet very real foretaste of heaven. It's an appetizer, if you like, as we wait for the main course.

Because only through our communion with Jesus in this life will all our deepest longings in life be fulfilled.

That's what we were made for. And the Lord's Supper promises that is what is coming. When life will be unending bliss and pure joy.

All because of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. And so as I close this afternoon, if you're not in communion with Jesus Christ today, in other words, if you don't know Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord, then receive Jesus in your heart.

[ 28 : 32 ] I would urge you and plead with you to take Jesus as your Savior. And it's not me who's saying this, it's Jesus, he is the one who calls you to repentance and faith.

And then he promises you all the benefits of his gospel, this gospel, that are signified by the Lord's Supper. Communion with him.

An unending joy, an unending peace forever. All signified by and through the Lord's Supper. And so let's look back to the death of Jesus and what he has achieved.

Let's look around at Christ's people and how we should love them. And let's look forward to that glorious future which is in store for all of those who know and love Jesus Christ.

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