

ROAD TO ANASTASIS!

Two Meals / Two Sacrifices

The Greek word for resurrection is anastasis. To believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to believe in God. If God exists, and if He created the universe and has power over it, then He has power to raise the dead. Jesus was having a conversation with Martha after the death of her brother, Lazarus, in **John 11:25-26 (ESV)** ²⁵ *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,* ²⁶ *and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* Martha quickly confirmed that she did believe. If we are to literally follow the Road to Anastasis, we too must share the faith of Martha.

For the month of April we will follow the footsteps of the Messiah who literally became the firstfruits from the dead. We begin our journey in what scripture calls the 'Upper Room'. It was just an ordinary room but it was the place Jesus spent His last hours with His beloved friends, He ate with them, instituted the New Covenant in His blood, gave them last-minute instructions and encouragement, and prayed His "high priestly prayer" over them. Then He went out to face the sorrow, betrayal, rejection, and death for which He had come into the world.

Not knowing the life changing events about to occur, the twelve disciples met with Jesus to celebrate the Passover. Although Mark (**Mark 14:15**) and Luke (Luke 22:12), referred to the place they were to meet as the 'upper room', Matthew does not provide that detail. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the "Synoptic Gospels" from a Greek word that means "to see together." Matthew, Mark, and Luke all view the life of Christ in a similar way. Matthew pictures Christ as the King of the Jews. Mark shows Christ as the Servant and writes for the Romans. Luke views Christ as the Son of Man, writing for the Greeks. John, however, presents Christ as the Son of God, and writes for the entire world. The first three gospels deal primarily with the events in Christ's life. John deals more with the spiritual meanings of these events.

Two Redemption Meals

Read Matthew 26:17-19 (ESV) ¹⁷ *Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?"* ¹⁸ *He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'*" ¹⁹ *And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.*

On the 14th day of the first month (Nissan on the Jewish calendar), the Jewish people observed Passover. Immediately after Passover, the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread was observed. Passover commemorates the final plague on Egypt when the firstborn of the Egyptians died and the Israelites' firstborn was spared because of the blood of a spotless lamb smeared on their doorposts. The LORD instituted the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread to help the Israelites always remember and proclaim their deliverance from Egypt. Their deliverance from Egypt was the great foreshadowing of the coming superior redemption of mankind from sin. Jesus the Passover Lamb shed His own blood for the purpose of covering our sin and to bring redemption to all willing to paint His sinless blood on the doorposts of our hearts.

On this special night as Jesus gathered with His disciples to institute a new Passover meal, there was a traitor in their midst. However, this did not come as a surprise to Jesus.

Read John 13:21-28 (ESV) ²¹ ..., Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side, ²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him.

It has been said, “The same sun that melts the ice only hardens the clay.” Judas is not an example of a man losing his spiritual life – Judas is an example of a man who only pretended to have spiritual life. In Judas, one of Jesus’ twelve, we see a picture of how close a person can come to salvation and yet remain lost forever. Jesus said in **John 6:64 (ESV)** ⁶⁴ *But there are some of you who do not believe.*” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.).

Some ‘bleeding hearts’ might think “Oh, poor Judas he didn’t have a chance ‘ since Jesus did say in **Matthew 26:24 (ESV)** ²⁴ ... *woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.*” Just because Judas’ treachery was known by God prior to his birth (foreknowledge), does not mean that God decreed beforehand (foreordained) that Judas would become a traitor. There is a difference between God’s foreknowledge and God’s foreordination. The God of the universe looked down through the ages and knew what Judas would do beforehand, but God never foreordained Judas to betray Jesus. Judas had his own freewill. He was free to yield to Christ or yield to Satan, just like each of us. Our failures and sins are not our predetermined fate. God has never decreed that any man or woman should live in sin, or that anyone should be lost. **Romans 10:13 (ESV)** ¹³ *For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* Judas made his own choice to be an agent of the devil to deliver Jesus to wicked men. Yes, it is sad and you cannot help but feel sorry for his choice.

Jesus had a specific reason for singling out Judas at this point. He explained in **John 13:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ *I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.* Jesus did not want the eleven to think that when Judas betrayed Him that Jesus was duped by Judas’ supposed allegiance.

This also served as Jesus’ final warning to Judas. He gave Judas every opportunity to change his mind just like Jesus gives people opportunity after opportunity today to choose Christ over Satan. But, with every unbeliever, there will always be a time when the door to salvation is closed.

When you compare the accounts, it is not completely clear if Judas was still present when Jesus instituted the ‘new Covenant meal’ or if he had already left to betray Jesus. Judas was present for the Passover meal and he was present when Jesus washed all of the disciples’ feet. I tend to believe Judas left to betray Jesus before the ‘new covenant meal’ was instituted.

Jesus had been sharing the Passover meal with His disciples and suddenly something changed.

Do This In Remembrance of Me

Mark 14:22-25 (ESV) ²² *And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."* ²³ *And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of 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 not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

Jesus must have certainly had the disciples' full attention when He said *Take; this is my body* and *this is my blood*. Through the centuries there has been much debate over various aspects of the Lord's Supper. This 'new covenant meal' is known by several names: the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, the Eucharist, Communion. Should we use wine or grape juice? Do the bread and the wine literally turn into the flesh and blood of Christ in the one who partakes of the Communion as the Catholics teach? Baptists and other Protestants generally take the symbolic view that the bread and the fruit of the vine picture the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross in the New Testament just as the Passover meal was symbolic in the Old Testament of how the death angel passed over the Israelites' houses where they had smeared lamb's blood on their doorposts.

However, in our time, a great indifference has arose concerning the importance of the Lord's Supper and its meaning, and the pendulum has swung dramatically from a great debate around the subject of the Lord's Supper to an even greater disinterest in the Lord's Supper. And this should not be so among God's children.

This meal at the Lord's Table was the last meal that Jesus would share with His disciples until after His crucifixion and resurrection. When we participate in the Lord's Supper, it should be a soul stirring experience, not something we quickly do for show while thinking of other things. It is an integral part of Christian worship. Its purpose is to cause us to remember our Lord's death and resurrection and to look for His glorious return in the future.

The apostle Paul wrote concerning the Lord's Supper and includes a statement not found in the Gospels. Let's investigate what Paul added.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 (ESV) ²³ *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,* ²⁴ *and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* ²⁵ *In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* ²⁶ *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* ²⁷ *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.* ²⁸ *Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* ²⁹ *For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

Paul was not present in the Upper Room. He received his direction later through a direct revelation from the Lord. Jesus chose to celebrate the Lord's Supper on the night when the forces of hell were meeting to destroy the Savior of the world. Notice that it says, "*when he had given thanks.*" He gave thanks that night while the shadow of the cross hung over Him.

He said concerning the bread: *he broke it*. Jesus broke the bread symbolizing the breaking of His body soon to come. Jesus' bones would not be broken on the cross as prophesied in *Psalm 34:20 (ESV)*²⁰ *He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken*. However, His body would be broken and so would His heart. It had to be that way. *Psalm 51:17 (ESV)*¹⁷ *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise*.

Next, Jesus spoke of His own blood as He shared the cup with them. Our life is in the blood! *Leviticus 17:11 (ESV)*¹¹ *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life*. The blood is the most mysterious of all tissues. Once the blood fails to reach the cells and members of the body, they promptly die. Today the church is His Body and it is His blood that was shed on the cross called Calvary that unites us to Him and to one another and gives us eternal life. Jesus, our Savior, freely chose to pour out His blood for us.

Jesus said: *Do this in remembrance of me*. This command was also recorded in Luke's account. So, if the question ever crosses your mind as to why you should take the Lord's Supper, this is your answer straight from the lips of Jesus: *Do this in remembrance of me*. And, we are supposed to do this until Jesus comes! Then, I suspect we will be participating in another supper – the Marriage Supper of the Lord – but that would be a lesson for another time.

Before we participate in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, we are wise to understand what it means to partake of the bread and the cup *in an unworthy manner*. Paul did not say that we had to be *worthy* to partake in the Supper, but only that we take it *in a worthy manner*.

Paul was writing to Corinth where there was much unfairness and gluttony surrounding communion. Paul said the people were not treating communion as a sacred ordinance instituted by Jesus. Instead of reminding people of Jesus' sacrifice, communion became a means of self-gratification, furthering the divisions among the Corinthian Christians. We do not face the same problem with our Communion. I suspect where Paul would find fault with believers today for taking Communion in an unworthy manner would for most revolve around taking the bread and cup without taking the time to consider the significance of what we are doing and repenting of our sins.

When our group visited the empty tomb in Jerusalem, we took the Lord's Supper there in that place where many believe Jesus literally rose from the dead. Whether it was literally in that spot or not makes no difference. The tomb is empty. What Jesus did for us is astounding. Even after we have accepted God's great salvation, time and familiarity may lead to the tendency of overlooking the significance of what Jesus did. He became sin for us. He died in our place. And how dreadful if we cannot even sit still long enough to do one small thing in remembrance of Him. *Take eat this is my body – this is my blood*.