

- A Covenant Meal

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Luke 22, verses 19 and 20. And he took bread. When he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, his disciples, saying, This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

You know, what's taking place here with his disciples on this very solemn, evening?

Solemn because Jesus knows what's about to happen and the disciples do not. But something incredible is taking place here that I think the significance of escapes and eludes us in a lot of ways.

[1 : 18] You know, as Jesus leads his disciples through this meal, which they have celebrated year and year and every year, he changes some things.

And he says some things here that are so foundationally different that I think even for the disciples, they missed what he was saying.

Because he says, he says, this cup is the new covenant. And it's like they were familiar with the old covenant.

But he said, this is the new covenant. And it's in my blood. And so I think to understand, to comprehend a little bit more fully what he's doing, that's why we go back to Exodus 34.

In Exodus 34, this is not the first covenant, but it is kind of a reaffirmation of the covenant, which God initially gave to Abraham all the way back in Genesis.

[2 : 26] And then renewed again with Isaac and renewed again with Jacob. And so he's now renewing it again, reaffirming that covenant.

But it's now expanded. Because here in this covenant, we see all of the elements of a covenant. And again, it's a little bit strange for us. We think sometimes of business contracts and sometimes arrangements like that. But we don't do covenants like this, except maybe at weddings. It comes close to that. But a covenant is an agreement, but it was an incredibly significant agreement.

And in that covenant, it involves several things. It involved stipulations. In other words, these are your responsibilities, the responsibilities for both parties.

[3 : 35] It says, this party has responsibilities, and they agree to do certain things, and this party agrees to certain things and has responsibilities. Also, in a covenant agreement, there will be the consequences laid out for the occasion that one of the parties would fail to keep their side of the agreement.

But here also, covenants were a lot more graphic than our typical contracts because they would take an animal, a bull or a ram, and slit its throat and pour out its blood.

And as we see back in Exodus 24, the blood was kind of divided up into two parts where part of the blood was thrown onto the altar of sacrifice, and the rest of the blood was then sprinkled on all of these 70 elders.

And then Aaron and his two sons, and they would be, in a sense, purified by this blood. But what that blood also demonstrates in this covenant, and maybe we ought to do this in weddings more often, was that the parties were saying, if I fail to keep this covenant, may I be like this pitiful, slain animal.

And so this was a very serious engagement. But one of the other more fun aspects of the covenant after this is that there was a meal.

[5 : 31] It was always a meal where they gathered. And this is where Exodus 24 is incredible. Because in Exodus 24, we see all of these elements of the covenant.

God has given them the rules. Israel has responded and says, we will keep, we will obey, and we do everything you've said. And then Moses sacrificed the animal and sprinkled the blood on them. And then those last couple of verses, in verse 9, it says there, that they saw God. Not just Moses, but all 70 of these elders.

Now, there were limitations in this. Because if you see, up at the very first part of this passage, it said they had to do it from afar. They couldn't get close.

But still, to be in the presence of God, they saw him. But even more significant, they ate.

[6 : 39] They had a meal. And again, that's worth so much more than for us. Because for us, we have a meal with about anybody. We'll go sit down at a sandwich place with strangers.

But in this case, in this culture, a meal meant that you were friends. Intimate friends, associates, even family.

That you, if you eat with someone, that's like your stamp of approval. Your stamp of acceptance on this person who now shares your bread.

This is why the Pharisees got so upset with Jesus early in his ministry because he ate with sinners, with tax collectors, and prostitutes and enjoyed it.

It was like he was putting his stamp of approval on them. But here, in Exodus, Israel eats with God himself.

[7 : 52] And it says, God did not raise his arm against them. He welcomed them. into his presence to share a meal, to give them a taste of what this covenant was all about.

Because he was going to make them a nation, but he was going to be their God. And he, and they were going to be his people. And there would be intimacy. So now, we come to the upper room.

Jesus says he brings a new covenant. covenant. In many, many ways, it has all the markings of the old. We even have in that upper room, if you read through the Gospel of John, we have again the covenant stipulations in a sense laid out.

Where he says, this is a new commandment that I give you. And what is the stipulation? What is the kind of obligation of the covenant? covenant? That you love.

That's the new covenant. But here, Jesus, though, changes, he changes the terms incredibly.

[9 : 11] a sacrifice was going to be required, but the blood would be his. Because no sheep, no oxen, no animal from the stable would be sufficient to bring about and inaugurate this covenant.

This is a new covenant. And it's going to go so much farther than any covenant previously. Because the blood of this sacrifice will be effective.

Because the funny, you know, what's not really funny, the sad thing about both of these covenant meals, in Exodus 24, these elders celebrated, they ate in the presence of God, they saw God, and they would go down the mountain and make a cow.

And proclaim that cow was their God. I mean, how could they forget so quickly? Well, here in the upper room, the disciples as well, they're going to celebrate this meal with Jesus, but yet in a few moments, you know, within a couple of hours, they would be all heels and elbows running in the opposite direction out of a sense of self-preservation.

But the blood of Jesus that he was going to shed would be effective to wash clean even traitors, friends who would betray, those who would profess but yet forget, his blood would wash clean the vilest of sinners.

[11 : 11] But another wonderful thing about this meal, this upper room, that we can't miss. See, in Exodus 24, it says that the disciples, or the elders, had to worship from afar.

Not in the upper room. In Exodus 24, all they could see was some semblance of God. They saw this sapphire pavement underneath him, but they didn't see clearly him.

But in the upper room, they look at God face-to-face. This new covenant was going to bring God's people so close and intimate, into intimate relationship.

And the sacrifice of the blood of this covenant would be sufficient to do that. where God himself will declare these twelve, who in a sense stand as the elders stood representing Israel, these twelve now represent us.

The friends, the intimate friends, brothers of God himself. God and that's what the new covenant does.

[12 : 55] It's not just a bunch of rules. It's not just something we remember because it makes us feel good. Every time we come and gather around this table and take these elements, it is a reenacting of this reaffirmation of the covenant where we remember the blood that brings us near.

And we also declare that I am yours, that I am under the blood, that I need this blood, I need this sacrifice, but yet it is fully sufficient for me.

And so we celebrate it together. And a covenant like this is more than worth celebrating. Let me pray for us.

Father, as we celebrate this time together, would you impress on our hearts the gravity of what we do.

Not that we would be morose or fearful, that we would come readily, that we would come freely and with joy even, but that we would come remembering the price that was paid to make this covenant possible.

[14 : 38] And that we would remember that we are now bound, we are covered, we are stained forever by the blood of the sacrifice.

We have been cleansed by the blood of the new covenant which is shed for us. May we relish in that.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.