

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

The Lord’ Supper

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Mark 14:12-25

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Mark 14:12; that’s on page 850 in your pew Bibles. The story we are about to read is Mark’s version of the Lord’s Supper. You remember that two weeks ago we talked about another supper that happened in the house of Simon the Leper. During that supper a lady – we presume Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus – anointed Jesus with perfume and offended several of the disciples – particularly Judas. Now, a couple of days later, the group is together again, this time in order to celebrate the Passover – the climax and high point of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This New Testament Passover – this Lord’s Supper as it came to be known is of course one of the most important things that we do together as the people of God when we gather together to worship. So we will read this story and then we will ask 4 important questions:

1. What happened?
2. What does it mean?
3. Who should participate?
4. What does it do?

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 12:

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, “Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?” 13 And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, 14 and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 15 And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us.” 16 And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. 17 And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18 And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” 19 They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, “Is it I?” 20 He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. 21 For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but 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.” 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.” (Mark 14:12–25 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

1. What Happened?

Our first question is probably the easiest to answer. *What happened* is that Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover together and in the course of the meal Jesus picked up a couple of the constituent elements and transposed them into a New Testament key. He picked up the bread and said:

this is my body (Mark 14:22 ESV)

He picked up the cup and he said:

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” (Mark 14:24 ESV)

But notice that he didn’t pick up the lamb or the bowl of bitter herbs. He didn’t say: “This lamb chop is my sacrifice on the cross” or “these bitter herbs represent the suffering that I will undergo on your behalf” – he didn’t do that. He didn’t carry over EVERY ELEMENT of Passover into the Lord’s Supper, he carried over some.

And in a sense that is very much in line with the overall relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Do certain things in Judaism carry over into Christianity? Absolutely! The 10 Commandments are pretty wonderful things aren’t they? The moral law of God – which is no less than the application of God’s character to human behaviour – those things are carried over and

further clarified by Jesus in his teaching and preaching.

And the stories too – the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 that these stories were written down for our instruction upon whom the end of the ages has come – these stories – the Old Testament stories of the Patriarchs and the Exodus and the wandering and the monarchy and the fall and the exile and the restoration – those stories have been passed on to us. They are OUR stories because they tell us who God is, who we are and how God will save his people through the gift of an obedient Son. So thanks be to God – a lot of stuff passes over.

But not everything passes over. We don't sacrifice lambs and goats and pigeons anymore; we don't have a temple, we don't have any Levites – a lot of stuff has changed, a lot of stuff is entirely new. And that is what we are seeing here.

Jesus doesn't just sprinkle some Christian spice over the Passover, rather he takes up certain, selective, constituent elements of the Passover and transposes them into a distinctly New Testament key. He builds the Lord's Supper out of elements lifted from the Old Testament Passover.

It's important for us to see that. That is what happens in this story.

Now what does it mean? That's our next question.

2. What Does It Mean?

And thankfully we have lots of resources to draw upon here. We have of course the Old Testament background, we have what Jesus has already said and done in his earthly life and ministry and we have what the Apostle Paul said in his correspondence with the Corinthians. So we are well equipped here.

Let's start with what Jesus actually says. As we mentioned already he picks up two constituent elements of the Passover and transposes them into a New Testament key. The first element he picks up is the bread.

Mark 14:22 says:

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." (Mark 14:22 ESV)

Now it is interesting that he doesn't pick up a lamb chop in order to make this same point. He could very well have done so. He could have said: "This lamb chop is me" that would have worked too – after all John the Baptist had pointed at Jesus, way back in the beginning of his ministry and said:

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 ESV)

So Jesus could have done that and we would have understood exactly what he meant. But he didn't do that. Instead he picks up the bread and he identifies himself with that. Now, we remember that this wasn't the first time Jesus had done that. After the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 Jesus gave an interpretive sermon that Mark doesn't record – but thankfully, John does. He tells us that the people in the crowd immediately made the connection between the miracle of Jesus – in feeding the 5000 – and the manna that Moses gave in the wilderness. They say to Jesus:

Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 35 Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life**; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:31–35 ESV)

So Jesus has already identified himself with the life giving bread – the manna – in the Old Testament. He says, "Like that I am what God gives for the salvation of his people. I am the Bread of Life."

Thus begins the Bread of Life Discourse and in that discourse Jesus goes on to say two more things that I want you to hear. First of all he says in verse 40:

everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:40 ESV)

Then at the climax of the sermon he says in verse 56:

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” (John 6:56–58 ESV)

So Jesus is saying, “I am what God has given for the salvation of his people. I am the Bread of Life. If you FEED ON ME – which verse 40 tells us to understand as “look on and believe on” – so if you take Jesus by faith – you will be saved. You will live forever.”

That was a sermon that the disciples had heard before, so when Jesus said at the Last Supper, take this bread – EAT IT – IT’S ME, IT IS MY BODY – there is no way that they didn’t hear that through the lens of the sermon he had preached several months before. They understood that he was offering them HIMSELF as the gift of God for their eternal salvation.

And when we take the bread we should understand the same. This bread MEANS to remind us of the gift of God in Christ for our salvation.

That is what you should be thinking of when you take the bread into your hand. Jesus is what I need for eternal life. Jesus is the gift of God for my salvation. His life is the life I owe God. His death is the death I owe God. Only by looking on him and feeding on him through faith can I be saved and restored and preserved unto eternal life.

Meditate on those truths as you hold this bread in your hand.

The second thing Jesus says has to do with the cup. He says:

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” (Mark 14:24 ESV)

Now a lot of things would have gone through the disciples’ minds’ when they heard that phrase. “Blood of the covenant” was a pretty loaded term to throw out before a group of first century Jewish people. To speak of the “blood of the covenant” is of course to recall the foundational covenant of the Old Testament. We’ve spoken about this many times.

In the ancient near east in the time of Abraham, Great Kings often made covenants with lesser tribal leaders. The Great King would extend certain benefits – things like peace and prosperity and justice – and then he would demand certain acts of loyalty and service in response: you will pay your taxes, pray for my health and lead a company of soldiers upon my summons and command. And then the covenant itself would be sealed by a solemn ceremony in which the lesser lord would walk through a pathway of blood. They would take a number of animals and cut them in two and spread them apart and the lesser party would walk through the pieces and by doing so proclaim a self maledictory curse upon himself. So be it done to me if I should fail in any of my obligations to the King.

That was how covenants were cut. Then the paperwork would be splashed with the blood of the covenant – the blood of the animals.

Now of course, the great twist in the Abrahamic Covenant is that God has Abraham cut all the pieces and prepare the pathway of blood – but then he puts Abraham to sleep – and under the figure of a torch and a flaming fire pot – God himself walks through the pieces – as though to say: “I will guarantee your side of this deal. When you fail me – as surely you will – I will walk the path of blood for you. I will pay the price for your sin and betrayal. I will do what is necessary to keep this covenant and to secure these blessings for you.”

That is the heart of the heart of the heart of the Gospel – Old Testament and New.

So when Jesus says: “This is my blood of the covenant” he was saying: “This is me walking the path of blood. This is me paying for your sin and failure. This is me keeping your side of the deal.”

And by the way – that is the point of the sandwich structure in this story. Look at it. The story of the Last Supper itself is actually very brief. It is told in verses 22-25.

But zoom out.

Look at what comes before. Look at verses 17-21. What is that? It is the story of Jesus predicting the betrayal of the disciples. He is predicting their covenant failure.

Now look at what comes after. Look at verses 26-31. What is that? It is the story of Jesus predicting the denial of Peter.

What is the point of telling the story that way?

Mark is saying: “Jesus is walking the blood path. Jesus is paying for our covenant defections. Jesus is paying for our sins and failures. That is what THIS BLOOD is all about.”

That is what you are supposed to see when you look into the cup.

Thanks be to God!

Now, the third question is this:

3. Who Should Participate?

Of course to ask that question is to assume that we are supposed to REPEAT in our times of worship what Jesus did with the disciples in the upper room. We know that to be the case because of what Jesus said that is recorded in Luke’s version of those events. In Luke’s version Jesus says:

“Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19 ESV)

The Apostle Paul repeats those words in his instructions to the Corinthians. He says:

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. (1 Corinthians 11:23–26 ESV)

Alright, so we are supposed to DO IT and we are supposed to KEEP DOING IT until Jesus comes and so that begs the question WHO SHOULD DO IT? That’s what we’re asking now.

For most of Christian history this was an easy question to answer. You would just say:
Communion is for baptized believers only

Church historian Shawn D. Wright for example says:

“Throughout Christian history the church has restricted Communion to those who have been baptized.”¹

And that makes sense if you think about it. Communion is the family meal, and therefore it is only served to people who are inside the house. Right? And baptism is the entrance ritual. Baptism is the front door and communion is the family table – so you have to go through the one to come to the other.

As I said, for most of Christian history that was the common understanding but nowadays in certain circles you have to be a little more precise than that and I want to take a minute and attempt to do that.

The first thing I want to clarify is that believing that communion is for baptized Christians only does not make you a CLOSED COMMUNION church. Closed Communion is far more specific than that. Closed Communion means that you require people to have been baptized by immersion upon profession of faith in order to take communion and many Baptist churches have held that view – in fact, probably most. However others have said, that no, even if you were baptized by sprinkling as an infant, so long as you later INTELLIGENTLY identified with Christ, then you can be welcome at the table, even if not welcome into membership in a Baptist church.

That’s what we are saying here. So let me be VERY CLEAR and VERY PRACTICAL. If you are here today as a Lutheran and you were baptized by sprinkling as an infant – as your PUBLIC IDENTIFICATION - and then you were confirmed in that identification as a 12 or 13 year old and you personally and intentionally accepted/embraced that identification – then you are welcome at this table. We gladly credit you as a follower of Jesus Christ. We cannot receive you into membership at our church because we preach and practice believers’ baptism but we do not discount the sincerity and reality of your faith. Every church to have meaningful membership has

¹ Shawn D. Wright *The Lord’s Supper in History, Theology, and the Church in Baptist Foundations* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 153.

to define some things in particular ways. We preach that the best way to baptize is by immersion upon profession of faith – and we practice that – we just did – but we don't police the table according to that precise understanding. We simply say: "You need to be a public and intelligently professed believer in Jesus Christ" – sometimes we use the short hand: "You need to be baptized" but we don't police the amount of water or the particular timing and sequence.

Does that make sense?

We prepare people for this experience the best way we know how – we confirm them in faith BEFORE baptizing them. Lutherans do it the opposite – they baptize them and then confirm them. We think they are doing it wrong but that doesn't mean we aren't crediting them as believers. If they believe and have identified then they are welcome. We happily share the table with them even though we couldn't admit them into membership here.

That is where we have landed as a church as a result of our wrestling with these issues.

Now I need to say two more things about this third question before we move on to #4. We're still answering the question: who can participate in the Lord's Supper? We've said that they need to be a publicly and intelligently or intentionally identified follower of Jesus Christ. They need to be baptized – however much water, however the sequence. They need to be have a personal and public belief in Jesus Christ.

And two more things; but they are quick and not controversial:

First of all, they need to be in a state of repentance. Note that I didn't say a state of perfection. Communion is not a reward for a sinless month. We are not looking for perfection, we are looking for repentance. Theologian Thomas Schreiner for example says:

"Theologically, eating unworthily refers to any blatant sin that remains unconfessed."²

So "blatant" means "a sin that you know about" – if there any of those that you haven't

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Lord's Supper in the Bible* in Baptist Foundations (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 143.

confessed, then you shouldn't take communion. Get right with the Lord, get right with any offended parties and then come back next month.

And then lastly you have to be at peace with the Body of Christ. If you are withholding forgiveness or cherishing a grudge or carrying on a campaign of quiet slander against a brother or sister, then do not partake. Repent of that, go and make it right and again, come back next month.

Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (1 Corinthians 11:28 ESV)

Before you come to the table make sure you meet the criteria. Examine yourself before you come.

Alright, our final question then is this:

4. What Does It Do?

Assuming that you have examined yourself and you are ready to come what can you expect to EXPERIENCE at the Table of the Lord?

I think there are three answers to that question that just about everybody would agree on and they are these:

- i. You will be recalled to the foundation.
- ii. You will be reminded of our future.
- iii. You will refreshed in your salvation graces.

The first one of those is probably the one we talk about the most. The Lord's Supper is designed to bring us back to the heart and centre of the Christian faith. It is intended to remind us of what Jesus did on our behalf.

Do this in remembrance of me. (1 Corinthians 11:24 ESV)

Some churches have that CARVED INTO the communion table. Our communion table is usually

covered in a white sheet so I wasn't 100% sure, but I looked and it is.

Communion is supposed to remind you that Jesus obeyed for you, died for you, was raised for you, ascended for you and lives right now before the Father to ever make intercession for you. He did and does all of that for you. You are supposed to remember that when you come to the table.

Secondly, you are supposed to look to the future. We get that from Mark 14:25. After giving them the cup and saying, "This cup is my blood of the covenant" Jesus said:

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." (Mark 14:25 ESV)

So Jesus is saying, this cup is like an appetizer and he won't go on to the main course – the main banquet until we are all gathered to him in the fully consummated Kingdom of God. Matthew's version makes that point even ore explicitly. He adds the fuller text and records Jesus saying:

"Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day **when I drink it new with you** in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:27–29 ESV)

So Matthew tells us that Jesus isn't just waiting, he is waiting for YOU.

The FULL Messianic Banquet will not get started until every single invited guest has arrived. That's one of the reasons Paul said that you shouldn't just eat willy nilly, you shouldn't just have your own Lord's Supper over here while another person is over there. There should be a unity to it. An altogetherness do it. The Lord's Supper is not a buffet. It is a thing we do together in anticipation of the joy we will share together with the Lord for all eternity.

Then lastly, we believe that the Lord's Supper refreshes us in our salvation graces³. We've talked about this before: we leak. We hold this treasure in jars of clay. We are cracked vessels and we need constant refilling and refreshing.

³ The supper of the Lord Jesus was instituted by him the same night wherein he was betrayed, to be observed in his churches, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance, and showing to all the world the sacrifice of himself in his death,¹ confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof, their spiritual nourishment, and growth in him, their further engagement in, and to all duties which they owe to him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other. (The Baptist Confession of 1689, Chapter 30, paragraph 1.

That's what the Table is for.

We turn aside together – we come in together - in order to meet and to be served by the Lord.

The mission is out there. But the Table is in here. So before you go, come. Come unto Jesus!
Take your seat and eat your fill. Because this is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God – let's pray together.