1-19-20

Exodus 24:1-11

Last week we considered Matthews account of the Last Supper, which we now celebrate as the Lord’s Supper in memory of Jesus and what He did for us on the cross. There is lots of depth to the Lord’s Supper, so we’ll spend a few sermons trying to learn what all is there for us.

One thing to note about the Lord’s Supper is that it is a sign or a symbol of a covenant between God and mankind. The Bible shows us that God is a covenant making God. He makes agreements with His people. Some are covenants that God promises to keep without requiring anything on the part of His people. The covenant God made with Abraham is an example of this: God chose Abraham and said He would give the land of Canaan to his descendants. There was nothing Abraham had to do in return; it was simply a promise God made to him. Other covenants, such as the two we are considering today, require action on the part of the people also.

When God makes a covenant, He always includes a sign. For Abraham, it was the sign of circumcision. When God made a covenant with Noah that He would never again flood the earth, God gave the sign of the rainbow. We human-beings are visual and we forget easily; this is why God likes to give us visible signs. When we see these signs, it is supposed to remind us of the covenant: the agreement between us and God.

We need to keep in mind the Scripture we read last week in Matthew 26, when Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper:

While they were eating Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”

And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you;

For this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

Jesus is giving the sign for us to remember the new covenant that is being instituted; the sign is the Lord’s Supper. Every time we celebrate Communion, we need to remember Jesus, all that He went through on our behalf, and the covenant we have with God as Christians.

Our reading from Exodus is about God establishing a covenant with the people of Israel. It is called either the Mosaic covenant or the Sinai covenant. It has these names because it was established through Moses and because it was given at Mount Sinai. I bring this covenant up because it is the first covenant of redemption. It was a way for the people of Israel to be redeemed to God. This covenant was replaced by the new covenant in Jesus Christ, which is also a redemption covenant. The Sinai covenant didn’t work, the people couldn’t hold up their end of the bargain. So, because God is merciful, He replaced it with the covenant in Christ.

Now, none of this surprised God. It wasn’t like He thought the Mosaic covenant would work; He knew it wouldn’t. In fact, God told of the new covenant coming through the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 31, starting with verse 31.

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

But we had to learn that it wouldn’t work. The Mosaic covenant was all by works and depended on the person’s obedience. We are incapable of that. God wants us to realize that we are entirely dependent on Him. But the amazing thing to see is the similarities between these two occasions: the giving of the Mosaic covenant and the institution of the Lord’s Supper. What we see in the initiation of the Mosaic covenant foreshadows the Last Supper.

Recall what took place leading up to our Scripture reading in Exodus 24. God had raised up Moses to lead the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt. He brought them to the base of Mount Sinai with strict instructions to avoid the mountain itself. The top of the mountain was engulfed in smoke and fire and lightning, and they heard thunder and loud trumpets. They knew that God was there. God then spoke the ten commandments to them. In fear, the people told Moses to go and listen to the LORD, and then come back and tell them what He said. This is what Moses did, and he came back with a long list of laws and regulations from God. In return, God would care for the people and protect them.

Moses was the mediator. He is the one who went between God and the people. Moses prophesied that One would come that was like him in Deuteronomy 18:15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you”. This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ; He is the mediator between God and all people who accept Him as Saviour. He was also the mediator of the new covenant just as Moses was of the old. Additionally, just as Moses revealed the terms of the covenant to the people, Jesus also revealed that the terms of the new covenant required faith solely in Him.

In this fallen world, all the covenants required sacrifice of an innocent. They required that blood be shed because the life is in the blood. This sacrifice ought to instill the gravity and the solemnness of the covenant. This is why the Lord’s Supper is to be a solemn occasion; we consider the death of One who was truly innocent.

In our reading in verse 5, sacrifice is offered. At this time, two different types of sacrifices were made: burnt offering and peace offering. The burnt offering was entirely consumed by the fire on the alter. It was a sacrifice that was given entirely and irrevocably to God. Now God certainly didn’t need this sacrifice for food or anything else; but if the people offered it with right hearts, in faith in God, it was pleasing to God that His people showed their obedience and love for Him.

The peace offering involved pouring out the blood and burning specific portions on the alter. The rest of the animal was to be eaten by the people. It was a time of fellowship and sharing and symbolically having a meal with Yahweh. This is what Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders would have eaten on the side of the mountain in the presence of God.

Of course, Jesus is the sacrifice in the new covenant. He was a burnt offering in the sense that He was offered up entirely to God, bearing the full weight of God’s wrath for our sins. He was also a peace offering. By paying our debt for us, we can now have peace with God; we are no longer objects of God’s wrath when we accept Jesus as our Saviour. During the Last Supper, Jesus gave the disciples the bread and told them to eat; it was His body. Certainly, the bread did not become Jesus’ actual flesh, but we see the symbolism of eating the flesh of the peace offering.

In what Jesus did on the cross, He completely fulfilled the requirements of the burnt offering and the peace offering; in fact, He fulfilled all the different sacrifices that were required in the Mosaic covenant. This is why we don’t have the sacrificial system any more. We don’t have to kill animals to take our place for atonement, Jesus took our place perfectly. The only sacrifice the Christian is called to is to be living sacrifices to God; we know that we owe our eternal lives to Him so we live for Him while we are on this earth.

Next, look at what Moses did with the blood of the sacrifice. The blood was always separated from the rest of the sacrificial animal and treated in a different way. Moses put half of the blood on the alter where it would run over the alter and into the ground. He then had the people agree to the covenant terms. Once they did this, Moses sprinkled the rest of the blood on the people.

Now consider Jesus; His physical blood was shed on the alter of the cross and it ran down to the ground. His was the blood that established the new covenant. When Jesus offered the cup of wine to the disciples and proclaimed that it was His blood, He was asking them to accept the terms of the new covenant and seal that acceptance by partaking of the cup. Like the bread, this wine did not physically become His blood, but symbolized it. When we drink the fruit of the vine in the Lord’s Supper, we are visibly demonstrating that we accept the terms of the new covenant.

There is one huge difference between what Moses did and what Jesus did. Moses sprinkled the blood on the people, Jesus has us drink His blood. In the old covenant, there was a covering that took place; the blood was on the outside. As we are told in Hebrews 10:4, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” When the Israelites took part in the sacrifices for sin in faith, God would cover their sins so they would not be seen. But the sins were still there; the guilt remained. It was not until the sacrifice of Jesus that sins would actually be erased and never remembered by God. The sacrifice of Jesus was retroactive to the pious Jews who died in faith. For us, our sin is gone now.

In the Lord’s Supper, the blood is not on the outside, but on the inside; we consume it. This shows that Jesus Christ actually lives in us. As Christians, He lives in us as we live in Him. In Leviticus 17:11 we are told, “The life of the flesh is in the blood”. Consuming the Lord’s Supper shows that we have received eternal life from Jesus. All this is true only if we have accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour; simply receiving the Lord’s Supper doesn’t save us.

Once the ceremony of Moses was over, he and the ones who were specially invited went part way up the mountain to have a meal. There is an amazing occurrence here, God the Father joined them. It is important to understand that they could only see His feet. The Bible makes it very clear that to see the face of God in our current condition would mean instant death. Even Moses only got to see God’s back, and Isaiah only saw His robe, which was enough to terrify him. So, these men had the privilege of eating in the presence of God; and so did the disciples. Remember that Jesus was both fully God and fully man; the disciples were in the presence of God at the last supper.

We can also see an image of Gethsemane. The people of Israel stayed back from the mountain, a select group came part way up the mountain, and later, Moses alone would go up to talk with God. The disciples came with Jesus to Gethsemane, He took His inner circle of Peter, James, and John further into the garden, but then Jesus went in by Himself to pray to God.

We must also look at the tragic figures of Nadab and Abihu. Aaron was Moses’ brother and became the first high priest of Israel. The line of high priests was to be hereditary; only in the line of Aaron. Aaron had four sons, and Nadab and Abihu were the eldest. It came about later that Aaron was officially instituted as high priest and all his sons were consecrated as priests also. The priests had huge responsibility to God and the people and were given very strict rules that they were to follow.

In Leviticus 10 is the account of Nadab and Abihu, who for some reason, took fire from somewhere in the camp and offered up incense to the LORD on it. This was strange fire which was outside of the commandment of the LORD; they failed to treat Him as holy. In response, the LORD sent fire that consumed them instantly and they died.

There is another tragic figure who sat at the table during the Last Supper with Jesus whose name was Judas. He also failed to treat the Lord as holy and betrayed Him. In sorrow and shame, but without faith and repentance, he hung himself. Earlier, when Jesus had prophesied that Judas would betray Him, He said that it would have been better for Judas to have never been born. Because of this, we know that Judas suffers eternally. Not specifically because of his sin, but because he rejected the salvation offered by Jesus.

From this we can see that not everyone at the Lord’s Table is necessarily a person of faith. We can also see that simple participation in the Lord’s Supper is not enough to provide salvation.

Remember that the prophecy of Jeremiah says that sins will be forgiven, not just covered up. That is what we have in Jesus. With belief in Jesus, comes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In this way, God’s law becomes written on our hearts, it is something that becomes part of us. Although there was grace in the Mosaic covenant, it was still based on a personal achievement that is beyond our ability. The covenant in Christ is completely grace; Jesus took all our sins; the Holy Spirit gives us the faith to believe. There is no part where we can claim any credit in our salvation. How beautiful a way to remember the grace of our Lord and Saviour, by sharing a meal with Him.

Prayer

Gracious Lord, thank You for the Lord’s Supper. Not only is it a sign for us to remember the covenant we share with You, but it is the only sign by which we share fellowship with each other. Jesus, You are the way and the truth and the life; You are the only way to the Father. We delight to sup with You in remembrance.

Your word shows us that even from the very beginning of time, it was required of us to have faith in You. Merciful Father, You even provide that needed faith so that we may have fellowship with You.

LORD, Your word shows us again and again that You have known what was coming, long before it came about. It shows that Your plan was in place from the beginning and things are working out according to Your will. This is evidence for us, that we can trust our future to You; that we can be comforted that You love us and hold us in Your almighty hand.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen