



JESUS AND THE LAST SUPPER

Part 89 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Dave Bruskas | Luke 22:1-23 | September 11, 2011

Luke 22:1–23

¹ Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. ² And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.

³ Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. ⁴ He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. ⁵ And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. ⁶ So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." ⁹ They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?" ¹⁰ He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters ¹¹ and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" ¹² And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there." ¹³ And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ²¹ But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. ²² For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" ²³ And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

INTRODUCTION

I want to invite you to start making your way to Luke 22, as we begin our eighty-ninth installment through the Gospel of Luke. We've just got a few more to go before we're finished, so we're very excited about that.

My name is Dave and I wanted to introduce you to my family this morning. And the easiest way to do that is by photo. So let me show you a picture of the Bruskas clan. As it's been said many times, I am truly a minority living in a sorority; never a dull moment, always drama, and always wonderful.

This beautiful young lady on the far left is my wife, Kara. She's not one of the five sisters; there are only four sisters. So just know if you bring that to my attention that, oh, this was another one of my daughters, that may be incredibly flattering to her, but it's deeply insulting to me. Jillian is thirteen. Each girl had a very special birthday this year, so Jillian, next to Kara, is thirteen. Jennifer is sixteen. Then Lisa is twenty-one. And Lauren is eighteen. And it doesn't matter what age that guy is on the end.

WHAT DOES COMMUNION MEAN TO JESUS?

We recently relocated here to Seattle from Albuquerque, and this is an amazingly beautiful city. Gorgeous city. And every day I have one of those "wow" moments where I pull out my iPhone to take a picture of something I can't imagine anybody from New Mexico having seen before, and take a picture to send back to those folks. And I want to show you a photo I attempted to take recently of Mount Rainier on a sunny day when the mountain came out, so let's show that. Alright, here's the problem with my iPhone. My default mode is the front-focus camera, which means all my pictures, at least the first take, end up looking like this. They are self-portraits, self-images, self-centered.

And that's exactly the problem that we face today as we look at this text of Scripture, where we see the origin of Communion as we look at Jesus celebrating his Last Supper with the disciples, and we see the advent of Communion in something that we celebrate every Sunday at Mars Hill Church as one of the two sacraments of the church that celebrate and honor Jesus.

My fear is that we first ask the question, "What does Communion mean to me?" instead of asking a more appropriate question, "What does Communion

mean to Jesus?" And we're going to see clearly in the text today that we study, that Communion means a lot to Jesus, and I want you to see why. One objective I have today, one simple objective, and that is that you would reverse focus in your understanding of Communion; that Communion would no longer be, Christian, about you and your failings and your struggles and your weaknesses. But instead it would be about Jesus.

And for you, non-Christian, really glad you're here today. My hope is that you would see Communion in a totally different light. That Communion isn't something you do to be right with Jesus, but it reflects the fact that he loves you and that he's able to forgive you. And that today, as we celebrate Communion after we hear the words of Jesus, that you would celebrate your first Communion as a new Christian today.

Let's pray, and we'll jump into the Bible together.

Father, you are a good and kind Father. In a country where today fatherlessness is having all sorts of impact, in a room today where many of the people are afflicted and hurting because of a bad earthly father, you are a great Father. You're a Father who loves his children with all the affection you have for your Son, Jesus.

Jesus, thank you that you being Eternal God, you humbled yourself, you took on the form of a baby, you became fully man, and you lived the life that we could never live. You went to the cross and there you died a brutal, shameful, God-forsaken death, absorbing the penalty that's ours for our sin, and you've risen from the grave, and you're at the right hand of the Father, and you are worthy of worship. And we want our time together today to be all about you, Jesus, and worshipping you.

Father and Son, thank you for the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, thank you that you don't live in ornate buildings constructed by human hands. You don't live in panoramic vistas, but you choose to indwell the people who belong to Jesus. Holy Spirit, we pray you would do heart surgery on us this morning. That you would take the truths of this Bible that we're about to look at, and you would help us to understand at the deepest level, Jesus loves us. Holy Spirit, I pray for those who are here today who don't know Jesus, that in our next few moments together they would meet Jesus, they would experience the forgiveness of sin, they would experience a freedom they've never known before, and their life from this day forward would be transformed. All this we ask that you do in the good name of Jesus, amen.

SETTING THE SCENE

I want to invite you to turn to Luke 22. If you're new with us today, let me give you some backdrop. As a matter of fact, the text that we're about to jump into does that, it sets the scene for us today. So let's just go right to Luke 22:1-2, "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him [Jesus] to death, for they feared the people."

Here's what's going on. One of the three required festivals or feasts that would happen in Jerusalem every year, that all males throughout Israel were required to attend, was the Passover. So if you're older like me, you've seen the imagery of the Passover, best depicted by Charlton Heston as Moses. Remember every Easter we got to see that? If you're younger, you probably saw *The Prince of Egypt* by DreamWorks.

It's that story from the Bible. This idea that God's people were suffering oppressive slavery at the hands of the Egyptians, and God delivered them miraculously, lovingly, perfectly. And as God's judgment of death came upon all the firstborns in Egypt, that God's people were spared, they weren't innocent, but they were spared through the death of a lamb. They would kill a lamb, they would wipe the blood, and God in his mercy made provision. And so we see that this is a picture of Jesus, and we'll get into that in just a moment.

So all these people are gathering into Jerusalem. Jerusalem is rocking—think in terms of a religious Woodstock. And so, religious Woodstock is descending on Jerusalem, and Jesus is rocking center stage. Jesus is drawing enormous crowds. He's incredibly popular with the people because he teaches them like they've never been taught, he loves them like they've never been loved, he leads them like they've never been led, he heals them, he cares for them, and he's an immensely popular figure in Jerusalem during the Passover.

The religious leaders, as we've seen in the last few chapters in the Gospel of Luke, are beginning to lose their war of words with Jesus. Every chapter we see Jesus engaging them in a new debate, and they walk away silent. So people are leaving them en masse; there's an exodus away from the religious establishment. They're losing adherents, they're losing influence, they're losing money, and they've come to the point where they're going to do something about it. They're going to kill Jesus.

But here's their PR nightmare. If they go after Jesus in the midst of the crowd at the height of Passover, then a riot will ensue. The people will rally around Jesus, so they have to figure out a way to apprehend and arrest Jesus when he's secluded from the crowd. They need an in, and they find it in a guy named Judas.

Here's what I want to do today. I want you to change your perspective of how you look at your relationship with Jesus. I want you to begin to see things more pronounced from Jesus' perspective, and Jesus' idea, and Jesus' heart, and I want that to shift the way you think. So I want you to reverse your role in understanding your relationship with Jesus. I want to give you three incentives to do so that come right out of our text today. And then I want to walk you through, from my own experience, the most difficult thing I've ever experienced in my own life, that you might be able to see how these truths work.

HIS PLAN IS BETTER THAN YOURS

So, first thing I want you to see today as we continue in Luke is this: His plan, Jesus' plan, is better than yours. It's better than yours. Let's look at the story as it continues. "Then Satan entered Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief

priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.”

There’s their in. They now have a mole. They have an insider, one of the key figures on Jesus’ senior leadership team, one of the twelve disciples who’s going to betray Jesus so the religious leaders can come and they can take him apart from the crowd so they don’t create an enormous stir.

And if you are one of the other disciples, if you’re one of the other eleven that’s closely connected to Jesus, that’s anticipating the coming of his kingdom, this is a really bad day. Things aren’t going according to plan. What could be worse than one of the guys closest to Jesus selling him out so that he might be murdered for money?

Peter looked at it this way in an earlier experience. In Luke 9, also recorded in Matthew 16, we get a picture of Peter. And Jesus asked his guys, “Who do people say that I am?” That’s the biggest issue when we come to Jesus, isn’t it? “Who is he? Who is he?” And the guys begin to recite and tally off common opinion. And so some said, “You’re John the Baptist re-birthed.” Or, “You’re a prophet of old.” And Jesus said to his guys, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter, through the work of the Holy Spirit, revealed to him by the Father, says, “You’re the Christ!” Peter gets it, Peter nails it.

And then Jesus, with this new understanding of who he is among his followers, begins to let them know of his plan: that he has to go to Jerusalem and die. And in the very next breath, Peter tries to apprehend him and say, “No, no, no, don’t do that. That should never happen.” Then Jesus turns to Peter and says, “Away from me Satan.” That’s a bad day when you’re a follower of Jesus and Jesus directly calls you “Satan.” Not a good day.

This is the problem we see with Jesus over and over and over again in the biblical narrative, and I believe it’s the same problem we see with Jesus over and over and over again in our own life. Everybody’s got a plan for Jesus. Everyone wants to co-op the agenda of Jesus. And we all have plans for what Jesus should do, but it’s not necessarily the plan according to Jesus.

One of the points that Luke is going to make through the rest of the narrative that culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus is that Jesus is in control. Jesus is in charge. Nothing is happening that’s a surprise to Jesus. Even Peter, who had an alternative agenda for Jesus, gets that after Jesus dies and is resurrected and the Holy Spirit descends upon the church in Acts 2.

Peter gives the first sermon, and this is what he says, from Acts 2, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus,” listen to this, “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”

You see the shift in Peter’s thinking? Where before Jesus goes to the cross and dies and is raised again, he said, “You can never die.” Afterwards, he gets the sense of God’s plan and the whole thing and says, “It was by God’s divine plan.” His plan is better than yours, quite simply, that’s it. His plan is better than yours.

WHAT’S YOUR PLAN FOR JESUS?

What’s your plan for Jesus today? Maybe you’re hurting because your plan hasn’t worked out. I came from a home that I think is pretty typical in our country today. Great parents, loving parents. My mom was Christian in name; she grew up in a religious home and thought that because of that she was a Christian. My dad was raised by a Greek Orthodox father, and his mother was an atheist, and so he was agnostic. And we would go to church twice a year, Christmas and Easter, because my grandma would bribe us. She thought it was important and so we were in it for the food and we would go.

My mom was an alcoholic. She was a binge drinker. And it was New Year’s Eve and she was going to another party and she knew how the night would end, that it would end badly, that she would be sloppy drunk before the night was over. And she began to cry and weep before she even entered the party. A woman met her at the door, took her by the hand, and said, “Betty, I want you to join me and some other ladies. We’re studying Jesus in the Bible.” My mom went to the Bible study with them, met Jesus, and then began to drag me and my little brother to church.

It wasn’t our favorite thing to do early on. And if that’s where you’re coming from today, you’re here because someone made you be here, church grows on you, alright? So just give it some time; I think it’ll work out for you. We went for several weeks, and one day my dad showed up at the front door ready to go to church. He was never going to go to church, and it was the late ‘70s, so think of John Travolta, *Saturday Night Fever*, but without any hair. That was my dad. He showed up at the door and said, “If this is the only way I can spend time with my family, I will go to church but I will never believe.” He lasted three weeks and he believed.

As a thirteen-year-old boy, seventh grade at the time, St. Patrick’s Day, 1979, I met Jesus. I’d always thought—and if you’re not a Christian today, maybe this is what you’re thinking—I always thought that what it meant to be a Christian was you didn’t do certain things that everyone else did, and you did other things that no one else did. And if you did enough of the right things and you avoided enough of the wrong things, that at the end of the day God would tally up your points. If you had enough points, if you had enough gold stars on the chart, he would love you and accept you.

Someone sat down with a Bible and explained to me that’s not Christianity. Christianity’s about you could never have enough points to earn God’s favor, but God in love and mercy has sent his Son, Jesus, that we might be righteous through him. And I began to pray a prayer that I don’t think most seventh grade boys pray, the day after I met Jesus. And I really thought it was from God. I began to pray on that day, “Jesus, give me a son that would change the world.” And I prayed that prayer up until I was twenty-five.

Now, I knew as a seventh-grade boy, some things had to happen for that prayer to come true. First of all, I needed to age a little bit, and then I needed to

find a woman, get married, and have children. And those things did work out. I was married to Kara. My oldest daughter, Lisa, was born.

Kara got pregnant again; we found out through the ultrasound it was going to be a little boy. Our little boy, David Michael, was born, a non-eventful delivery. He came late at night and so after he was born he went into the newborn nursery and Kara and I retired to a semi-private room. I slept on the floor and fell asleep for a few hours. She woke me in the night and said, "David's not here yet, would you go down to the nursery and check on him, and just make sure everything's okay?"

So I went down to the nursery, he wasn't there. The nurse there said, "Come with me, Mr. Bruskas, I've got some bad news." We walked into the NICU, and there he was. And the poor little guy was just trying to catch his breath. He was laboring in his breathing, he was grayish-blue colored, and they said, "We're not sure what's going on with your boy, but something's happening in a pulmonary way with his heart, with his lungs; he's not getting oxygenated blood throughout his system, and we need to transport him to the nearest children's hospital."

My father-in-law gave me a ride behind the ambulance transporting him, and I'll never forget the conversation I had with Jesus during that ride. For thirteen years I'd been praying for this moment. This was Jesus' plan for my life, that he would give me a son, and through that son the world would be different, the world would be changed for him.

And as we made that drive to the children's hospital, I was hurt and I was angry and I said, "Jesus, you must have the wrong plan. Remember, we had a plan! Jesus, you must have the wrong guy. We're not on the same page anymore. What's happening here? God, I don't understand this. Father, I don't get what's going on." And I remember in the quietness of my heart, the way the Father spoke, he said, "My plan is to change the world through my Son. Will you be a part of my plan? It's a good plan."

Don't know where you're coming from today. For some of you, you're hurting terribly because life hasn't worked out according to plan. Somewhere the script got changed. Maybe you desired a family with lots of kids, and the kids are there, but there's no dad, or there's no mom, you're a single parent. It's all you can do to summon the energy to get your kids taken care of and truth be told, Jesus seems distant and you feel let down by Jesus.

Maybe you always wanted to be married. Maybe you're single and it's beyond the timeline that you laid out for yourself to be single. Maybe you're single, but you once were married to a person that you thought would be along your side the rest of your life, and that person was unfaithful, and that person betrayed you, and that person is now gone. And you're hurting because Jesus really hasn't followed your script. And the result is there's a strain in your relationship with Jesus.

Maybe you had a good financial plan in place, and that plan's a wreck. That's about true of all of us now, isn't it? Money set aside so that you could be generous and you could have margin in your life so you could give to the cause of Jesus, some money set aside for retirement, and you've lost everything in this great recession and you're back to zero and now you don't have a job, and you feel that somewhere along the line Jesus sold you out.

Maybe it's a health issue. Maybe you did everything right according to the books to be healthy, and you have cancer, you're not well, it's a struggle for you just to have energy to do basic things day in and day out, and you feel let down by Jesus.

Maybe you're not a Christian. And I love to talk to people who aren't Christians yet. The people who aren't Christians yet, as it pertains to God, always have action plans, "I'm going to do this. I'm going to get my life together. I'm going to start going to church. I'm going to read my Bible and if I stick with it and stay with it long enough, eventually I'll come to know Jesus." It's not an effective plan, according to Jesus. It's really a plan that will lead you to hell and separation from Jesus.

There's good news today: He has a plan! And his plan is good and his plan isn't one-dimensional and finite like yours because all you can really do with your plan is figure out your best days. You can only control the things you can control. So not only can you not control outside influences, you don't have any sort of capacity to control evil. But God's plan is a good plan. God's plan takes the best shot from his archenemy, Satan, infiltrating the inner circle of Jesus, having Judas betray Jesus and hand him over for the purpose of the King being assassinated. And God doesn't do evil, as Pastor Mark said. He uses evil. God has a plan. Jesus has a plan.

My hope today is that you'll change your perspective, you'll reverse your default mode of looking at your plan, and you'll begin to understand who you are in Jesus' plan because he loves you. And his plan is good.

HIS WORD IS MORE RELIABLE THAN YOURS

Second thing I want you to see today is this. Jesus' Word is more reliable than yours. Let's continue with our story in Luke, verse 7, "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.' They said to him, 'Where will you have us prepare it?' He said to them, 'Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'' And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.' And they went—" And I want you to focus on this phrase, 'cause you're going to see this over and over again in the Gospel of Luke, "And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover."

Isn't that a great story? It's like a spy novel, right? *Bourne Identity: First Century*, or *Mission Impossible: Jerusalem, Passover File*. Clandestine. Not quite sure what exactly happened before this, don't know if Jesus just made these arrangements. I also know that he's God and he can know everything and do everything without planning like you and I do. It was very common for all the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem, who didn't live there, if they were going to celebrate the Passover meals that they had to find a banquet room. And so the people in Jerusalem oftentimes made a little money on the side by

renting out rooms.

I want you to focus in on that phrase. Jesus says something that's predictive. Jesus says something that we think, "Are you sure?" And over and over and over again this pattern unfolds that we find out it's just as Jesus had told them.

And this is an absolute contradiction to the way the disciples deal with Jesus, 'cause they're saying crazy things all the time. They're making commitments to Jesus all the time, and they rarely follow up on their commitments. But every time Jesus speaks, they find out that his Word is true. His Word is reliable. His Word is dependable.

Peter, himself, will say in the verses that follow, during the Last Supper, "Lord, I will never leave you. I'll be by your side. I'll go to jail with you. If need be, I'll die with you." Jesus lets him know, "You're going to betray me before the sun rises." And confronted by a teenage girl at a campfire, Peter gives in and denies Jesus.

But we contrast that with Jesus. Every time he speaks, it's true. That's good news. That's very good news because my word isn't reliable. Your word, despite your best intentions, not reliable, no guarantees, not a sure thing, not always certain. Not so with Jesus.

Whatever Jesus says comes true, and this is critically important 'cause Jesus says a lot of things like this that aren't overly important, but he says crazy things like, "I'm going to die," and "I'm going to raise from the dead in three days." And he sets up the reliability of those bigger things by being true in the details, in these smaller things.

My word's not reliable. We have this tradition in the Bruskas home—I'm not going to follow through on it during this relocation—but every time we move, I make the mistake of telling my kids we're going to get a new pet. Kind of like I'm going to cushion the blow, and you can get a pet.

We had moved from one house in Albuquerque to another, it was Saturday morning, it was Dad-make-waffle day, Mom get a break and get outside of the house. And so we're gathered around waffles, and Jillian looked across the table and said, "Dad, you're a liar." Okay, that was a little stern. Pet was there, we moved, pet wasn't there yet. I said, "Technically, my dear daughter, I'm not a liar. A liar, from the dictionary, from a semantical basis, means that you have an intention to deceive. Truthfully I'm just unreliable because I said I was going to do something, and didn't follow through with it." And she responded, "Quite right, dear father. That's correct."

Some of you are laboring under the misconception today that your relationship with Jesus is secured by a pronouncement you've made. You make commitments, you've made vows, you've pledged your obedience, and somehow you think that it's your word that governs your relationship with Jesus, when the absolute opposite is true. It's the Word of Jesus that sustains you. It's the reliability of Jesus that keeps us going. It's Jesus being true and dependable and reliable without flaw, without error, without fail, that keeps us in his good graces and love.

AN UNRELIABLE VOW

So we got to the hospital, there was a panel of doctors that began to evaluate our son's case. Pediatricians, cardiologists, surgeons. And they got together, and this was the prognosis that they gave Kara and me about our little boy. They said, "He's got a congenital heart defect, but we think we can fix it. At least we can shunt blood around so that he gets oxygenated blood to his body. So here's what we think his life will look like."

And they gave us a very specific analogy. They said, "He will be the kid that when he's a teenage boy, he'll be jumping in the swimming pool, diving off the board, you know, doing the things that kids do, that teenage kids do in swimming pools. He just won't ever be the kid that can be on the swim team." That sounded pretty hopeful to me. As a matter of fact, that wasn't all bad because the last thing the world needs is another man in a Speedo, right? So that's okay. May I have an "amen," sisters today? Guys, did you hear that? You wear board shorts to the pool, right? No one in their right mind wears a Speedo.

And I remember in that moment, getting that good news, I made this vow, "Jesus, I know it's going to be rough, I know there are going to be surgeries that follow, I know there will be uncertainty at times, but I will not back away. I will not waiver. I'm going to be, not only strong with you, I'm going to be the man my family needs me to be. I'm going to lead. I will never back down."

Several surgeries and several weeks later, things hadn't gotten any better. Quite frankly, they were a lot worse. During the major surgeries, after he was finished, we would try to extubate him with the doctor's help, and remove the tube that helped him breathe. And it was brutal. Poor little guy would just heave and cry, like a fish out of water, couldn't get any oxygen in his lungs. We would have to re-intubate him. And one complication led to another; now there were ulcers, now there were infections.

On one Saturday night I was reading a book by his bed, Kara was at home with Lisa, and I just happened to look up, and blood began to drip through his NG tube that was feeding him. And I called the nurse in and the nurse then summoned doctors. Doctors came into the room, they said, "We're going to have to ask you to leave. We'll get back to you in a minute."

And I was done. I was finished. I had nothing left, especially as it related to Jesus. I had made the vows, I had made the promises, but I couldn't keep them. And it was in a day before cell phones were prevalent. I remember making my way to the pay phone, picking it up, calling my mom, and saying, "You've got to pray to Jesus because I can't anymore. I'm not sure where I'm coming from or what I believe, but I don't have strength."

You need to understand. It's the quality and reliability of his Word that sustains us. And over and over again throughout this Gospel, we find Jesus saying things that we tend to be dismissive of or doubtful towards, and again and again and again, guess what? They prove to be true.

Non-Christian, listen to me. Don't think just because you've made a vow to Jesus in a tight spot that you're in right relationship with him. I met a guy named Jimmy when I was in college who served in Vietnam. He was a tunnel rat. His job was to go in and extricate the enemy from their tunnel system. And he was in so many tight spots that he had, in the midst of one of those very tight spots, made a vow to Jesus, saying, "If you will just let me get through this war, I will serve you the rest of my life." I met Jimmy twenty years later and he was a washed-up drunk. And his life was totally disconnected from Jesus.

You need to understand: his Word is reliable. His Word is true. His Word is effective. His Word is sustaining. Your word, not so much. Will you turn your perspective? Will you change your outlook today? Will you repent and not let your relationship with Jesus be about your vows, your commitments, your pronouncements, but instead trust in his promises because they're true and they're reliable and they're good?

HIS LOVE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS

Last point and we're done. Let's get to the heart of Communion. His love is bigger than yours. Luke 22:14, "And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired—I have earnestly desired—I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'"

I want you to understand something that's going on there in the original language of the Bible. Jesus likely spoke in Aramaic. The Bible was written in Koine Greek, an ancient Greek language, and that phrase that's translated "earnestly desire" is the same word twice. It means Jesus is emotionally charged up. Jesus is passionate. Jesus is having a big time come-to-Jesus moment with his disciples.

I think John captures it best, another disciple that was at this meal, when he says in his gospel account that Jesus loved his disciples to the end. Why would Jesus be so excited about this? I can think of two reasons for sure that it wouldn't be. One, perhaps, Jesus is just a traditionalist and the Passover is such a sentimental thing. He'd been celebrating it now for probably thirty-two years. But he's about to change the meaning of it forever. He's about to fulfill Passover. He is about to become, as John the Baptizer proclaimed, "And behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." So I don't think it's that.

I can't imagine that it was the food that Jesus liked, that it was the unleavened bread and the bitter cups to drink and the roasted lamb. Isn't this the same Jesus who said, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God"?

I think Jesus is fully aware of what he's about to accomplish. That he is going to redeem his disciples. That their relationship will forever be changed because he's going to go to the cross, die for their sin. He's going to become their sin, that they might become the righteousness of God, and they are going to have a new relationship going forward that ultimately will be perfected in the kingdom of God where they will live in perfect relationship with him and worship him all the time. And he is passionate about that end. Don't forget when you take Communion today, it means a lot to Jesus. That he earnestly desires to have this family meal with us today. That he loves you.

Let's look at the text. He gives more meaning, "He took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' And he took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, 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.'" Underline that, highlight that, circle that. We'll come back to that. "This is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

Understand what Jesus is saying. You really have to have a panoramic view of the whole Bible to understand the significance of what he just told his disciples. That this meal they're having is about to be forever changed through his body and his blood, and through his work on the cross on our behalf. And he says something that's absolutely profound that you can't move past quickly. And that is, "It's the blood of the new covenant."

The Bible provides us this concept, start to finish, that God pursues sinful, undeserving people through covenant. And God makes a promise to a man named Abram in Genesis 12, that from Abram he will produce a great nation, that Abram's name will be great, and through his descendants and the nation that forms, he will bless all the families of the earth.

Then God defines the covenant a little bit further when he ransoms his people out of Egypt, and that's known in the Bible as the old covenant. And because God loves them, because God has forgiven them, because God's mercy is upon them, he gives them—plays out to be 613 commandments that they keep, not so that he will love them, but because he has, and they can now live in right relationship, worshiping him.

But as the Old Testament begins to unfold, there's this problem: God's people don't really love him very well, and they don't obey him. And God makes an amazing promise in the book of Jeremiah that I want to read for you. Jeremiah 31:31, and I want you to pay attention to a repetitive phrase over and over again here:

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each other, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will

forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

What phrase, Mars Hill, do you see over and over again? “I will. I will. I will.” God the Father says to his people, “I will do this. I will rectify this. I will change this. I will fix this.” Jesus comes, and during the Passover meal, he says, “It’s my blood,” and blood was necessary for the execution of a covenant. “It’s my blood by which all these ‘I will’ promises will come good.”

So Jesus is saying to his disciples, God, out of his love for his people, is bringing forgiveness, bringing reconciliation, giving them his Spirit that they might live in a free life, in a transformed life, being obedient from the inside out. And he’s doing it perfectly through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. That’s good news. That’s good news! That’s the best news. It means that there’s a way now, through Jesus, through his perfect life, through his sacrificial death, through his victorious resurrection, that you and I might have a relationship with God, one that’s without sin, both positionally and practically.

I want you to see that his love is bigger than yours. And I want you to stop looking at your relationship with Jesus based upon how you love him, and instead see that he loves you. And not just an abstract, conceptual love, but a love that’s spelled out in his own blood. That’s what this meal’s all about that we’re going to share together today. It’s about his love for you.

A COLD HEART

Our son died on December 15. Things got really bad in the last couple days. The doctors, on the 15th, summoned Kara and me into the room and said, “There’s nothing more we can do.” They said, “As a matter of fact, he’s only breathing through the mechanism of a life support. We think you need to remove it now.” So we prayed and we discussed it and we talked about it. And it became evident that he had declined rapidly and there didn’t appear to be any life left. And so we signed the paper that you have to sign to absolve the hospital and the doctors from any liability.

And then they let me take him in my arms, and they disconnected his tubes, and he was gone in an instant. And then Kara and I held him, ‘cause we couldn’t hold him very often when he was constrained by tubes. And we had Lisa, his older sister, come in, and she got to kiss him on the cheek. And family members came and cried over him and held him. They allowed us to have as much time with him as we wanted to have, and we stayed for quite awhile. And we put him back on his little hospital bed. And as we were leaving the room, I remember looking back one more time, saying, “Jesus, it’s not too late. If you want to raise him right here, right now, I’ll gladly receive him.” Nothing.

All of a sudden, my mind was filled with fog. You ever have a foggy mind? Ever been depressed? Everything’s foggy. My heart was cold, particularly towards Jesus. Went home and didn’t sleep well that night. Got up the next day and just started raking leaves; just had to do something. Fall had happened, we were living in Texas. Fall had happened in the months that I was in the hospital, there was a lot of yard work to keep up with, and I raked leaves for a day. Next day, went to the funeral home, made arrangements. Mind was still foggy. Heart was still cold.

The day of the funeral came and for some close friends and family members, we had a viewing, and so people came in and could say their goodbyes and closed the casket and wheeled it into the funeral home where we were having a service. Still cold towards Jesus. Totally cold. Didn’t know what I was going to do. Didn’t know what the future held. Didn’t even know, honestly, what I felt or thought about Jesus.

Then the service began. The most amazing thing I’ve ever experienced in my life. I was sitting there with Kara, I had her, holding her on one side and she was crying and I was cold. And it was as if Jesus came in on the other side, like my big brother. Put his arm around me. Not just my cool big brother, but my big brother who is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Pulled me close, and as if he said, “I got this. I got this. This is what I came for. And I’m not letting you go. Don’t worry about your heart because it’s my heart that keeps this thing going.”

And after the funeral was done, we had a graveside service. We put the casket in the ground, and after the first couple of shovelfuls of dirt were thrown in, a guy played a trumpet solo of “Amazing Grace,” and those words, even though no one was singing, just caught me. And in that moment, I knew the presence of Jesus like I’ve never known before or since. He was there and he loved me. He warmed my heart, he restored my heart, and it wasn’t through my effort, and it wasn’t through my ability, ‘cause I had nothing left to give and I didn’t know that I wanted to.

A LOVE SPELLED OUT IN BLOOD

See, that’s what this meal really is all about. You know what is going to happen in our story that Pastor Mark will pick up on next? You know what the disciples do after this amazing intimate moment with Jesus? They start arguing about who’s the greatest. Isn’t that just like them? It’s just like us, isn’t it? You know what Jesus does in light of that? He goes to the cross. He pays for their sins. According to Scripture, he rises from the dead for their justification. And he transforms them and they change the world.

I want you to take Communion differently today. Christian, it’s not a time to be morose and morbid. It’s time to realize that your Creator, according to Colossians 1, the Lord Jesus, through whom every one and every thing was created, until ultimately everything returns, he loves you. He’s eager to have this meal with us together today, family. ‘Cause he loves us and his love isn’t abstract. It’s an efficacious type of love. It’s a thick love. It’s a transforming love. It’s a love that’s spelled out in blood. It’s a love that we remember with bread and wine. Will you change your focus today and focus on what this meal means to Jesus?

Non-Christian, how about today you take your first Communion as a new Christian? I have non-Christians ask me this all the time, “Pastor Dave, I understand intellectually what it means to become a Christian, that you turn from your sin and you trust in Jesus alone. But I don’t understand what it feels like.”

Let me tell you what it feels like. Two things are going on simultaneously right now in your heart. One is much greater than the other. The first thing that's happening there is you begin to feel a sense of guilt and brokenness and legitimate shame over the fact that this very Jesus, who has loved you, who has pursued you, who has died for your sin, you've rebelled against and you've resisted, and you feel legitimately bad about that. But there's a second feeling that overcomes the first feeling, and that's the realization that you're loved and that you're pursued. And it's through his perfect life, his substitutionary death, his subsequent resurrection that you might be forgiven of sin and freed to walk in a new life, revolving around him, worshiping him. Will you respond to him today? Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you that it's your love that changes. Thank you that your disciple, John, later says, "And this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us." And that his Son, you Jesus, are our propitiation for sin. You are the answer to the sin-issue that separates us from you. Thank you that you love us. Thank you that you sustain us. Thank you that you free us. Pray that as we share this meal together today as a family, we would see it differently. I pray for those in the room who are not yet Christians, that they would meet you in this very moment, that they would turn from sin, that they would trust you, not just with a head knowledge, but with an affected heart. And that together we would walk out of this place radically transformed, on mission with you, to tell the whole world about this great love. In your good name we pray, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.