MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

Mark 14:1-31

Key Verse: 24

“‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them.”

Thank God for guiding us to study about the five offerings in Leviticus (the burnt offering, the grain offering, the fellowship offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering). God’s words concerning these offerings were fulfilled in the life of Jesus, particularly the last two days of his life, which we are going to get into. That is regarding the Last Supper, his trial and death, which provided the long-awaited, glorious atonement, sacrifice, ransom, and redemption for sinners. Today, we will think about the meaning of the Last Supper.

Verse 1 says, “Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two says away.” In short, Jesus would die in two days. So he would die on Friday, and now it was Wednesday night. According to Matthew 26, it was when Jesus had finished his teaching about his coming again and the end of the age. At this specific time, the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. “But not during the Feast,” they said, “or the people may riot.” What a contrast between God’s plan and human’s plan! God’s plan always prevails, while man’s plan is frustrated. Proverbs 16:9 says, “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.” One can plan any course as he wants, but it is God who determines his steps. And Proverbs 21:30 says, “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD.” Making any plan against the LORD is only wasting time, even one’s whole life. Paul says in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” We should set our course according to God’s will.

Now the scene is changed. Verse 3 says, “While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.” We see that the author Mark goes back what happened in the previous week on Saturday. For it is written in John 12:1-3, “Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany…a dinner was given in Jesus’ honour…Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume…” The woman was Mary. It was a striking and radical act that she broke the alabaster jar of very expensive perfume and poured the perfume on Jesus’ head. It was an act of pouring her heart on Jesus because of her love for him. Yet, no one seemed to understand this act of her love. Verse 4 says, “Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, ‘Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” In this response of some people present, we see how precious the perfume was, worth more than a year’s wages. What an expensive perfume! In loving Jesus, she did not spare anything. She did not calculate in her act of love but poured her whole heart on Jesus. It is true that to the eyes of the people of the world, her act was a sheer waste. Who can spend a year’s wages in an instant, pouring the perfume of such wages on someone’s head? Surely, it is up to who the person receiving that treatment is. Some people there could calculate and know the value of the perfume in the alabaster jar but did not know the value of the person Jesus. And they appeared to care for the poor, but actually they did not. According to John written in John 12:6, he points out Judas Iscariot and said, “He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.” And the people rebuked the woman harshly based on their superficial and unsound judgment out of impure motives.

Then how did Jesus respond? Jesus said in verse 6, “Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.” What a totally different response! What an utterly different view! What an encouragement to her! Jesus absolutely protected her with the divine authority of his word. In this situation, no one was to assault and bother her. Her act was a beautiful thing to Jesus.

Jesus continues, “The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.” Deuteronomy 15:11 says, “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhearted toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.” Giving and caring for the poor, charity is important. In Galatians 2, when Paul met the Jerusalem church leaders, he clearly said that he was an apostle to the Gentiles, while Peter was an apostle to the Jews. The leaders in the Jerusalem church and agreed this and Paul said in Galatians 2:10, “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” Yet, as for him the first priority was preaching the gospel of Christ Jesus as he said in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, “What I receive I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins…” Jesus also said in Mark 13:10, “The gospel must first be preached to all nations” in view of his coming again. Our first priority should be in worshiping and serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here, Jesus said, “You will not always have me. She did what she could.” Jesus would die soon and be gone. The time for Jesus to live on the earth is limited. According to John 12:3, the woman was none other than Mary, and in Luke 10:39, she listened to Jesus sitting at his feet whenever Jesus visited the house with her and her sister Martha. At this time, she must have known about Jesus’ imminent death on the cross, which he had been saying openly to his disciples and surely to Mary, personally. When Jesus said, “She did what she could,” she knew what she was doing. Mary must have thought of her life and what she would do to Jesus considering the limited time he had left in this world. She must have calculated about what she would do with her most precious thing. In this calculation, she brought her alabaster jar of very expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus’ head, which was pouring her heart and future and everything on him. It was really a timely service. Jesus said, “She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.” We see how much Jesus was encouraged by her. And what insight! This is what the woman exactly did. We know that Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes on the day of Jesus’ death and burial (Jn 19:39), but she was the one who did this kind of thing beforehand. According to John 12:3, “the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” Such a fragrance might stay on his body even for a week. Her act of pouring the perfume on Jesus was an anointing of Jesus who would rise again from the dead as God’s promised King. For she personally experienced Jesus’ power of resurrection when Jesus made her dead brother Lazarus come back to life and she most likely believed in Jesus’ own resurrection through attentively hearing from Jesus.

Finally, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” What a compliment from Jesus! All people of the world want their names to be remembered, written on the streets, buildings, benches, even on towels. They want success and accomplishment in this world for their names to be remembered, even making use of the name Jesus. But all will be forgotten in matter of time (Eccl. 1:11). But to be remembered by Jesus will be true and remain forever. What we do to Jesus, especially timely services and sacrifices, will be accepted and remembered forever. When Mark wrote this gospel, her name was not known to the readers until John disclosed her name around 20 years later. A nameless one’s service and sacrifice Jesus remembers, accepting and blessing it in a great way.

Thank God for guiding Paulina to put aside her law degree and lawyer position and go as a missionary to Brazil where human circumstances are worse than here in Canada. What a blessing it is, offered to and remembered by Jesus! May God continue to lead her missionary life there as she holds to her life key verse, “I want to know Christ”! May God raise up the people of pure devotion and sacrifice to Jesus, always available to the Lord, living according to his time schedule him, not to their own plan and schedule!

In verses 10 and 11, “Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.” Judas was the one who lived and moved according to his plan, which would be frustrated and end in tragedy.

Now verse 12 says, “On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, ‘Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover.” It was the time to sacrifice the Passover Lamb. Sacrificing the Passover Lamb was customary to the Jews for the last 1500 years. The disciples sensed that at this time of the Passover, Jesus had not yet prepared at all, different from other times, to eat the Passover with them on that evening of the day. For Jesus knew that this Passover would be the last one and the customary act would end after the long history of the Passover. This Passover, as the last one, would be special in the transition to a kind of new Passover in the New Covenant. Jesus was carefully following God’s leading so that no one and nothing would thwart this plan of God. So Jesus delayed the preparation to the last moment so that Judas might not know the place of the Passover and let Jesus be arrested by the chief priests beforehand. Judas would come to the table of the last meal but would not have a chance to report it to the enemies of Jesus. Even other disciples would not know the place so that the information would not be leaked and go out. We sense that a quiet yet serious battle was going on!

Verses 13-15 say, “So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, ‘Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” What a preparation done in secret, never done before! The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

In verses 17 and 18 it says, “When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating…” At this time, we are to know the procedure of the Jewish Passover table. It began with a prayer of thanks and was followed by the first/opening cup of red wine doubly diluted with water and the washing of hands. Then there would be the eating of bitter herbs with the flat bread, not a big fat loaf, which would be the first course, and then singing of the Hallel, Psalm 113 and 114. Then would come the second cup of wine and eating of the lamb and bread, the main meal/course. And then there would be third cup of wine and they would sing the rest of the Hallel, Psalm 115-118. And they would have a final sip of wine and one more Psalm, 136, and leave.

So in verse 18, the eating would be the first meal, the eating of bitter herbs with the flat bread, broken and distributed and then dipped into a paste made from fruit and nuts. So the fist meal was done customarily. While they were having this first meal reclining and relaxing at the table, Jesus announced a shocking news, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.’ They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, ‘Surely not I?’ ‘It is one of the Twelve,’ he replied, ‘one who dips bread into the bowl with me.’” How painful it must have been for Jesus to be betrayed by one of the Twelve, whom he had loved and served with his whole being. Yet, Jesus saw this betrayal by his own disciple in light of God’s word. The expression, “One who is eating with me” and “one who dips bread into the bowl with me”, reminds us of Psalm 41:9, “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” So Jesus said continually, “The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him.” It is true that things will go according to God’s sovereignty and his sovereign will, but it does not eliminate human responsibility. Yes, Jesus’ life would go according to the words of the Scriptures, even his betrayal, but Jesus said clearly concerning Judas, “Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better if he had not been born.” What a poignant truthful statement! We are to know that God’s sovereignty and human responsibility go together.

Now verse 22 says, “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body.” The eating might be the main meal course after the second cup. At the first meal, Jesus’ announcing his betrayal by one of the Twelve was shocking, but also at this main meal, Jesus’ saying, “Take it; this is my body” was truly shocking and sensational in view of the long Passover history. For the past 1500 years, the unleavened bread had been called the bread of affliction (Dt 16:3), through which they would remember their time of suffering in Egypt and God’s liberation from bondage. But the meaning of the Passover would be completely changed. From that night, the bread would not be the bread of affliction anymore, but the bread of Jesus’ body, which he would give through his death on the cross. As the bread was broken, so would his body totally broken on the cross. From the bread of affliction to the bread of Jesus’ body. It is like from Exodus to the Cross. From that time on, there would be no more legitimate Passover, which God would recognize. That night would be the turning point of the Passover into a new one, remembering the cross of Jesus, his death on the cross. It would be the end of all the ritualistic ceremonies, Levitical offerings and sacrifices, diet laws and Sabbath laws and temple worship. Who could change such a long history of God’s chosen nation Israel at just one table of that night? No one but Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus said in John 6:33, “The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” This was not only the change of the trend of the nation but that of the whole world. The bread of God is the bread of life that gives life to the world. It is certainly through his death on the cross. When Jesus said, “Take it; this is my body,” he was instituting the Lord’s table, the Communion. What a blessing it is to participate in the table of the Lord! Yet, we can go further that taking his body is feeding on Jesus to have life in and through him. It is also related for us to eat daily bead, coming to him and listening to him each day.

Then in verses 23 and 24 it says, “Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them.” This cup might be the third cup. The meaning of the cup was also changed into the cup of Jesus’ blood of the covenant, new covenant, forgiveness of sins. Jesus said in Matthew 26:28, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” In Luke 22:20, “…This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” The core of the new covenant written in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” From now on there would be no more the blood shedding of the animals. At this Passover the blood of Jesus would be poured out to bring forgiveness of sin and so cleanse us from our sins and make us holy. Hebrews 9:13-14 says, “The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God?” This blood of Christ would be once for all. The efficacy of Jesus’ would be for all who believe and remains forever. This blood of Chrit Jesus is to be remembered through the participation in sharing the cup. According to 1 Corinthians 11, Jesus said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me”, and “This cup is the new covenant in my in my blood; do this…in remembrance of me.” The communion is to remember Christ’s suffering and his grace of forgiveness of our sins. Furthermore, it is for us to taste the grace of forgiveness of sins more and more at each time of sinning through the realization of sin. As we studied in Leviticus, it is really blessing to realize and be made aware of sin through the words of God. Then we can come to God and experience the efficacy of Jesus’ blood anew and go deeper into the grace of Jesus’ blood shed on the cross. It is confessing our sins in repentance through realizing and acknowledging our sins before God at each time. Praise Jesus who poured out his blood on the cross to forgive all our sins. In this grace of Jesus’ outpouring of his blood, God wants us also pour out our whole heart and life to Jesus as Mary did.

Jesus continues in verse 25, “I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.” Jesus planted hope of the coming kingdom of Christ in them, which would be established when he comes again. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:26, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

In verses 27-31, Jesus predicts his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead and Peter’s denial. These are all according to the Scriptures. But Peter just showed his human loyalty and his own righteousness and confidence in his pride, which are so deceptive and fragile to be shattered at any time, not even lasting for several hours.

Thank God for the Last Supper, at which Jesus said, “This is my body; this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” May we take his body and drink his blood into our souls and as a response may we also pour our heart and precious things to him.