

Eastwood Baptist (AM, 25/3/'18) **JESUS TAKES THE CUP** (Mark 14:12-26,32-42)

What is the most memorable meal you've ever shared? For most of us as Australians, Christmas is probably the annual celebration where shared meals are most memorable. For a first century Jew, their most memorable celebratory meal would have been Passover. And for Jesus' disciples their most memorable Passover meal would almost certainly have been the meal described in Mark 14, which we call "the Last Supper".

**Preparing for Passover** (14:12-16) Mark's account of the preparation by Jesus and his disciples to share this significant meal emphasises that it was a Passover celebration. He uses the term "the Festival of Unleavened Bread" at the beginning of the account, immediately followed by mentioning the sacrifice of "the Passover lamb". He then uses the term "Passover" three more times in four verses. The Festival of Unleavened Bread and Passover, incidentally, were closely associated, but the precise use of the two terms varied. Mark seems to be referring to the whole week of observance as "the Festival of Unleavened Bread" and to the evening meal at the beginning as "Passover". Why this emphasis, since it is generally agreed that Mark was writing mainly for Gentile Christians? I think that the answer is that we can't fully appreciate either the Last Supper or the Lord's Supper which springs from it without understanding their Passover background. At Passover, the Jews remembered (and indeed continue to remember) God's saving work within their history, especially the great event of the Exodus, of God's saving his people out of Egypt. So as Christians we need to remember that God's work of salvation doesn't begin with us - our God has always been a saving God, and his plan of salvation goes back to the beginning of time. In addition, there are several other features of Passover celebration which are instructive for Christians. The Jews kept harking back to the Exodus as the foundational event of their faith and their identity. As Christians we need to hark back in a similar way to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Finally, the Passover meal was an occasion for fellowship, for celebrating a shared faith and a shared salvation. Again, this should be true of our celebration of the Lord's Supper.

**Celebrating the Last Supper** (14:17-26) We now come to the account of the Last Supper itself, in which the first few verses emphasise the betrayal of Jesus by Judas - **read 14:17-21**. Particularly solemn and striking are Jesus' words in v.21. These words were for Judas, but not just Judas. They were for all the twelve disciples, and for Jesus' disciples throughout history. We are reminded of the solemnity of Jesus' death, of

the deep offence of rejecting Jesus as Messiah. Therefore we must never take Jesus' death for us lightly, or take our remembrance of his death lightly. Moreover, the way in which Jesus speaks of Judas's betrayal focuses on his offence against table fellowship. This reminds us of the sacredness of our relationship with Jesus and our relationship with one another as Jesus' disciples. And it reminds us that one of the aspects of the meaning of the Lord's Supper is the celebration of both of these dimensions of fellowship, fellowship with Jesus and fellowship with one another. The following verses (22-25) are those which we often read before the Lord's Supper - **read**. They say a lot to us about the meaning of the Lord's Supper. First, there is the symbolism of the bread and the cup. Of the bread, Jesus says, "This is my body." Of the cup, Jesus says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." Therefore, whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are reminding ourselves of the costliness of our salvation, reminding ourselves that Jesus gave up his life for our sake. And we are reminded that his death created a new covenant, a new solemn agreement between God and those who put their faith in the Son of God. Then Jesus looks to the future: "Truly, I tell 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." Here Jesus is speaking of the fulfilled Kingdom, of the time of his triumphant return. Consequently, a part of the meaning of every Lord's Supper is a joyful anticipation of that great day, and our share in it. The Lord's Supper is rich in meaning, and we should try to think of this when we share in it.

**The Son Takes the Cup** (14:26,32-42) **Read v.26**. This verse bridges into the Gethsemane account, and we shall go straight there, omitting Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial. **Read vv.32-34**. Here Mark gives us a moving insight into Jesus' feelings as he faces the Cross - his "soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death". We also see his strong desire for the support of the inner group of his disciples, which is mentioned twice within these three verses. In these verses we see Jesus' true humanity as he faces a terrible death, the horror of which he only knows better because of his divinity. **Read vv.35-36**. Jesus again prays out of his genuine humanity, shrinking from the death which he faces and asking God to spare him that ordeal. But he also prays out of his unique relationship with God as "Abba" Father, using a word appropriate to a close personal relationship with one's father. And he willingly submits to his Father's will, despite his full understanding of the death to which he was going. This would have included both its physical and its spiritual dimensions. The first of these was well-known to most people of Jesus' day, including those for whom Mark wrote his Gospel, but we need to be reminded that it was a particularly cruel and agonising death. The second

was known at this point to no human being other than Jesus, but we know that Jesus was going to take all human sin upon himself, causing him to cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" **Read vv.37-42.** In this final part of the passage the emphasis is on Jesus' desire for the disciples to stay awake and support him in his prayer, and on his exhortation of his disciples to pray also for their own sake, so that they will not fall into temptation. Jesus' words carry great weight, since they spring from the climax of his own prayer life. He exhorts us not to wait for the time of crisis, but to "watch and pray", to be consistent in prayer, so that when the crisis comes we will be able to pray as Jesus prayed.

**Conclusion** Isn't it wonderful that we have been allowed to have this precious insight into the very heart of Jesus? Isn't it wonderful to see the depth of his love both for the Father and for us? And to know that his love for us is a perfect reflection of the heart of God the Father also. Let us give thanks for the love of God poured out to us through Jesus Christ!