

# This Is My Body!

Exodus 12:14-28, Mark 14:12-25 (ESV)

May 18, 2003

“And as they were eating, he [Jesus] took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’”

Here are words both familiar and strange. “This is my body.” Taking, blessing, breaking, and giving bread, Jesus said, “This is my body.” Reclining at table with his disciples, celebrating the Passover, remembering the Exodus, rejoicing in God’s salvation, then suddenly turning the focus to himself, Jesus took the bread and said, “This is my body.” Anticipating his betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus broke the bread and said, “This is my body.” Looking ahead even to us, in all our neediness and despair, which he knows so well, Jesus blessed the bread and said, “This is my body.”

Somehow these words sum up and communicate who he is and what he is about. It is not the bread, as such, that is important. Yes, in a way this is about communion, but it is also about so much more than communion. The underlying dynamic here is not about how Christ is present in the sacrament. The underlying dynamic is about the greater truth and reality to which the sacrament points. It is the person and work of Jesus Christ that are important. It is the life and ministry of Jesus Christ that are important. It is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ that are at issue here. What these words communicate is the gospel pure and simple. “This is my body.”

What, then, is this good news? First, Jesus Christ sustains our lives. He also gives us our lives, as our creator, but that is not the main point being made here. The point here is that, having once given us our lives, he also continues to sustain our lives which is to say that he gives us life continuously, from moment to moment, holding us in existence, ever precious to himself. Jesus nourishes our souls. He carries us forward from one day to the next. He undergirds our being. He provides for our needs. He binds up our wounds. He heals our disease. He forgives our sin. That, more than anything else, threatens us with death. That, more than anything else, he overcomes. He restores us to God. He restores us to himself. He restores us to each other. Jesus sustains our lives from here into eternity. For this, we give thanks to God.

Second, Jesus Christ sustains our lives precisely by giving his own life. This is much more remarkable than the first. It is not only the case that Jesus gives us life and sustains our lives but also that he does so by giving us himself. That is, he not only gives us bread to eat, but also, he is the bread which he gives us to eat. He feeds and sustains us at great cost to himself. The bread is broken and given. The bread is eaten and consumed. So is his body crucified, dead, and buried. He gives us his very own life. Jesus never takes the easy way out. He does not heal us from the distance of not being involved. He does not forgive our sin by royal edict, simply making it go away. He does not offer us something at no cost to himself. Instead, as surely as the bread is broken and eaten, Jesus gives himself, his life, for us. This is the horror and the wonder of what he held in his hands that night. "This is my body."

Third, what Jesus Christ calls upon us to do in this wonderful exchange enacted at the Last Supper is for us to receive this gift of himself. "Take; this is my body." He gives us his very life, suffering that we might rejoice, being condemned that we might be justified, being consumed that we might be filled, dying that we might live. And so he does not tell us that we have to earn the gift, either before or after the fact. He does not say that we have to deserve it or to make ourselves worthy of it. He does not say that we have to lift the burden we cannot lift, erase the mark we cannot erase, undo the evil we cannot undo, take back the words we cannot take back, restore the life we cannot restore, or heal the wound we cannot heal. Those are not ours to do. Christianity is not a self-help program. The gospel of Jesus Christ is, instead, the gift of help from beyond ourselves, and Christianity is the grateful appropriation and acknowledgment of that which is beyond what we can do for ourselves. "Take; this is my body."

As Christ offers us yet today bread and cup, nourishment and sustenance, grace and forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration, life and new life, we are made to realize how hungry and thirsty we are. We are a hungry people, in a hungry church, in a hungry world. It is to us that Jesus says, "Take; this is my body." We are a thirsty people, in a thirsty church, in a thirsty world. It is to us that Jesus says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." Indeed, we are a needy people, in a needy church, in a needy world. It is to us that Jesus gives himself. And we are a sinful people, in a sinful church, in a sinful world. It is for us that Jesus pours out his life. You know as well as I that we, the church, and the world are hungry, thirsty, needy, and sinful in more ways than we can count. We also know that Jesus Christ fulfills all our need. That is why we are here again yet today.

The gospel according to Mark tells us again the good news that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gives himself for us, suffering that we might be free, dying that we

might live. The only human being who was ever without sin, the only one who, in that sense, was never needy, the one who was in constant communion with the Father so that he neither hungered nor thirsted, this one—Jesus, the Son of God—gave himself on the cross to take away our sin, to satisfy our need, to fill our hunger, and to quench our thirst. Thanks be to God!

This is what Jesus means when he tells his disciples and us, “Take; this is my body.... This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” We were designed and created to live in relationship with God. Our only true nourishment is this bread, Jesus Christ, which we receive in faith. Just as God has given us physical bread to sustain our bodies, so does God give us this spiritual bread to sustain our souls, our selves, and our lives. This is the only food for our souls that is meant for our well being. Eat this bread and live, or neglect it and die. Drink this cup and be saved, or turn away and be lost. Receive this gift and come into the kingdom, or refuse it and wander in the darkness. What will it be? What is your choice?

Consider the alternatives. We could fill ourselves with the junk foods our culture offers, encouragements to even greater self-esteem, and all the self-help literature. Those might taste good for the moment, but they burn out quickly and leave us empty again. We could eat the bitter breads of anger, hatred, contempt, jealousy, and self-pity. There are many who encourage us to partake of those. But they cannot sustain life! They twist, misshape, distort, and destroy human life. Those bitter breads are poison. They pull us down and kill us.

Human nature being what it is, we will fill ourselves with something. That is for certain. But there is only one good choice. If you want to live instead of dying, if you want to love instead of hating, if you want to flourish instead of withering, if you want to thrive instead of starving, if you want to be obedient instead of disobedient, if you want to be faithful instead of unfaithful, there is only one choice. God our creator, judge, and redeemer has provided for all our need in the life, death, and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Here is the gift of life! “Take; this is my body.... This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”

One thing that Mark emphasizes in today’s reading is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, freely and willingly goes to his death for us. Even the evil in the situation worked, without realizing it, to carry out the plan of God. While Jesus Christ suffered evil, lies, and injustice, he was not simply a victim of evil, lies, and injustice. Over and beyond all this he freely and willingly moved toward his death for us. It is his gift to us! His life was not simply taken from him. He gave it for us. The false conviction and unwarranted execution of the Son of God were horrible, the depth of human sin, but they did not catch God unaware or off guard. It all happened within the plan and purpose of God.

In fact, God used this impending moment of the greatest evil as the very tool to defeat sin and evil. In the moment of Christ's death—the giving of his body, the shedding of his blood—Jesus completed and perfected his life of obedience to God. He was faithful and obedient to the bitter end. And so, one time in all of human history, a human life was lived and completed in faithfulness and obedience. And for his sake, God has counted us all clean! What he alone accomplished is so good that it counts for all of us! Thanks be to God for his great mercy!

Christ won the victory for us, and so the victory is surely ours. This one time in human history, love was not defeated. Sin, hatred, evil, and death did their worst, but they could not corrupt Jesus Christ. He did not stop loving even those who killed him. He did not curse those who mocked him. The forces of evil attacked him and spent themselves entirely but unsuccessfully, and so were undone, defeated. They continue to thrash around, but they have no final power over us. The death of Jesus Christ was a gift—a free and willing gift, perfect victory of faith, obedience and love. This is why Jesus is the bread which alone can nourish and sustain us. Christ restores us to good relationship with God, and this is our salvation.

We are a hungry people, in a hungry church, in a hungry world. It is to us that Jesus says, "Take; this is my body." What, then, are we to do? We are to eat! We are to receive the wonderful gift. We are to fill ourselves with this nourishment. And so we are to begin to become what we receive. God's grace elicits our gratitude. Christ's faithfulness calls forth our faith. His love inspires our love. His obedience encourages our obedience. We each fill ourselves with the wonderful gift.

Moreover, we realize that even the church, whether local, regional, national or international, cannot live by its own strength. As the church, we do not live by our own intelligence, wits, designs, desires, plans, programs. Even and precisely as the church we live solely by this gift of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

We hungry people in this hungry church also live in a hungry world. The world is dying—starving to death—for lack of this precious bread. There are people who have not heard the gospel, have not received this gift, and are dying in desperation. We need to carry the gospel into the world and bring the world here to the gospel. Jesus does not mean for us to keep this to ourselves! If the words of grace, forgiveness, love, acceptance, help, encouragement, and sustenance are good for us, then we want to share them with all of God's children, in all places, in every home in this neighborhood, this city, the surrounding counties and all around the world. Let us do this, for Jesus' sake.

We are a hungry people, in a hungry church, in a hungry world. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift, his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior! "And as they were eating, he [Jesus] took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given

## **This Is My Body**

5

thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’”

*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, Minister  
Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church  
1627 Monument Avenue  
Richmond, Virginia 23220  
[www.grace-covenant.org](http://www.grace-covenant.org)