

Visible Words

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[0:00] You may be seated and let's hear God's word preached.! It was a reward for the righteous. It was not God's gift to those who have been extra good this week. It's medicine for the sick. It's solace. It's comfort for sinners.

It's alms. It's a free handout. It's grace to the poor. And so tonight we do offer our unworthiness to God that he might make us worthy in Jesus Christ.

We offer our despair, despair of ourselves, that he might comfort us. And we offer our poverty, that he might lift us up.

The bread and the cup, they're visible words. They're visible words of grace to sinners. What does the Lord's Supper say?

[1:24] Well, three words, three things tonight. First, it says peace. Secondly, it says fellowship. And thirdly, it says rejoice.

So peace, fellowship, rejoice. And we're going to see these things from the book of Exodus. Exodus 24. And I'd invite you to turn there. Exodus 24.

Pastor John has already made reference that the Lord's Supper is the token. It's the token of Christ's covenant love to us. The Lord's Supper is a covenant meal.

And that's actually what we see in Exodus 24. A covenant meal. I'm most interested in verses 9, 10, and 11. But I want to set the stage first.

The NIV has as a little title over chapter 24, the covenant confirmed. And that's what this chapter is about. It's about the confirmation, the ratification of the old covenant.

[2:28] And how Moses and Israel and God confirmed the covenant together. So let's begin reading. I'll begin reading at verse 1. And I'll make some comments as we go until we get to verses 9, 10, and 11.

Then he said to Moses, that is the Lord said to Moses, Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel.

You are to worship at a distance. But Moses alone is to approach the Lord. The others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.

When Moses went and told the people all of the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice. Everything the Lord has said, we will do. Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said.

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up 12 stone pillars representing the 12 tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrifices, young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord.

[3:41] Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it to the people.

They responded, we will do everything the Lord has said. We will obey. So that's the first step of confirming a covenant, of making a covenant.

Covenant promises are made. And you notice it was the people who promised to do something in the old covenant. God gave his law, and they said, we will obey.

Everything the Lord has commanded, we will do. The new covenant, though, is not like the old covenant in that way. In the new covenant, we do not promise God obedience.

Instead, God promises us grace. God said, I will make a new covenant with them. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt because they broke my covenant.

[4:50] So the new is not like the old. The new covenant is unbreakable. And the reason that it is unbreakable is because it is not the people.

It is not us promising to do something. Instead, God says, I will do it. I will put my law in their minds and write it upon their hearts.

I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more. So that's the first step of covenant confirmation, of making a covenant.

Covenant promises are made. Now let's keep reading at verse 8. Moses then took blood, took the blood, remember the blood from the bulls, and he sprinkled it on the people.

And said, this is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all of these words. Now, I have a question. Does that phrase sound somewhat familiar?

[5:50] On the night that our Lord was betrayed, Matthew says, Jesus took the cup, he gave thanks, and he offered it to them saying, drink from it, all of you.

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. So the old covenant was confirmed with the spilling of blood.

It was ratified, guaranteed with the blood of bulls. And so Moses took the blood, he sprinkled some of it on the altar, and then he sprinkled some of it on the people.

Well, why would he do that? Why would he sprinkle it upon the people there at the foot of the mountain? It was them saying, we guarantee this covenant with our lives.

Let the blood be on our heads. We will obey, or let the blood come upon us. But again, the old is not like the new.

[6:54] Yes, there is blood spilt, but it's not the blood of bulls. It's the blood of the Son of God. It is Christ who's saying, this is my blood of the covenant.

It's not the blood of bulls and goats. It's not the blood of sacrifices. It's my blood. That guarantees the validity of the new covenant.

And so his life is the guarantee of the covenant. And so God says, I will forgive you of your sins. That's a promise for you tonight. If you are inside of Christ, I will write my law in your hearts.

You will all know me. I will pour out my spirit upon you. I will remember your sins no more. Well, how can God make those kinds of promises to people like us, to sinners?

Well, Christ died. God made the promises. And Christ, His Son, made the offering. So Christ's death is the ratification of the new covenant.

[8:01] It is the guarantee, the seal of the new covenant. And so it was His blood that was spilt. It was His blood that was shed to guarantee the promises that God made.

It was His blood that was spilt to formally put the covenant in place. Now, we come to the part that I'm most interested in tonight.

And it has the most to do with actually what we are doing here tonight. So look at verses 9, 10, and 11. Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the 70 elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel.

Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites.

They saw God, and they ate and drank. So promises were made, blood was spilt, and now they eat a meal together.

[9:09] They ate a meal. And so that's the last stage of confirming a covenant. In the ancient world, this was how a covenant was made. So promises were made, sacrifices were offered, and then they would eat a meal together.

Now, the same sort of thing happens today. So we have a wedding, and we do the wedding, and there's these oaths that are taken, these vows that are taken.

And then generally, what do we do? After the oaths are made, the promises are made, there's no sacrifices, but we do go and have a party, have a feast afterwards.

And it's the same sort of thing happening back then. So it gives both families, family of the bride and the family of the groom, an opportunity, and all the friends of the families, to celebrate these new promises that have been made, this new relationship that's been established in the marriage covenant.

Now, that covenant meal back then had powerful symbolic importance. It was very important symbolically.

[10:23] What it said, this meal that these Israelites, these Moses and Aaron and Nadab and Abihu, and then the 70 elders who represented the Israelite community, that meal that they had said the same thing that the Lord's Supper says to us.

It says the same thing. It says peace. It says we are at peace. It doesn't say what they ate or drank. Perhaps it was bread and wine. But it says they saw God. But it doesn't say what he looked like or what they saw.

But notice what it does say in verse 11. And this is what the author, what Moses draws our attention to as being significant.

But God did not raise his hand. He did not raise his hand against the leaders of the Israelites. There was peace. God did not strike them down.

[11 : 32] There's peace. Now, in Genesis 26, Isaac and Abimelech were sort of in the middle of a cold war. They were fighting over water rights.

And in that time, in that place, water was important. It's the stuff of life. And Isaac, his flocks are growing, and he needs water.

So he's digging wells. And Abimelech and the people of Gerar, they're not happy with what Isaac is doing. And there's all this tension in the air. It wasn't an out-and-out war yet.

They weren't fighting with armed men yet. But things were getting really testy. And in the middle of this, Isaac is still prospering.

Abimelech sees that. And he comes and he says, let's make a covenant together. Let's make a covenant. Let's make peace. God has blessed you. Let's make peace.

[12 : 27] And it says that Isaac then made a feast for them. And the feast said the same thing that this feast in Exodus 24.

And this feast says to us. It says now there's peace. There's once hostility. Once there was no way that we could have a relationship with God because of our sins.

But because of what God has done, now there is peace between us. And because of the new covenant, dear Christian, we are at peace with God.

We can come into his presence. And his hand is not raised against us. It's not raised against you. Yes, you are a sinner.

And you will be until Christ comes or you die and you go to glory. You are a sinner. But this covenant is not decided. It does not turn on our obedience.

[13 : 31] There's grace. And for Jesus' sake, he will forgive us of all of our sins. And so he's hung up his bow. He's put away his sword.

But he just hasn't done it. He just hasn't said, oh, there's no wrath for you. The sword of his wrath had to fall. And he has quenched.

He's put out the fire of his sword by putting it into the blood of his son. And so what we never could have done, could our zeal, no respite, no.

Could our tears forever flow? All our sighs and all our tears. Could never atone for our sin. Could never make peace with God.

But what we never could have done by the law, by our good efforts, God did by Jesus Christ.

[14 : 34] Made peace. And so how doubtful and uncertain and distrusting we have the tendency to be of our Father's heart.

we wonder if there's not perhaps some secret hostility against us. But the supper is saying to us, no, there's peace.

There's peace between you and God. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Peace. It's more than that.

It's fellowship. Fellowship. See, it's not just a sign of the halting of hostilities. That would be glorious and that would be great that there's no hostility. But it goes farther than that.

The supper is positively a sign of friendship, of fellowship. So to eat with someone in the ancient world, it's not like it was.

[15 : 31] It is in our world. To share bread with someone was an implicit, it was an unspoken promise that you were friends. A promise of friendship.

It was an implicit promise that I am for you and you are for me. That what I have is yours and what you have is mine. Together, if we share food together, we share life together, we share everything together.

And that's why David says with heartbreak in Psalms, and Jesus himself came to know it in his own experience. Even my close friend who I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted his heel against me.

We shared bread. We were close friends. And he betrayed me. So to share bread is to say it means that we're close friends.

Imagine that. That you are close friends with God. And imagine that he wants you to know that and experience that and live that.

[16:47] So what amazing grace to sinners. Once we had nothing to do with God, and yet he's reconciled us.

That doesn't only mean that there's now no hostility, but positively, we are friends. We share together. We could even say more than we're just friends.

Who do you share your bread most with? Who do you eat with most of the time? Well, you do it with your family. Probably. Do it with your family.

And God, in the supper tonight, says to us, you're my family. Christ says to us, you're my brothers. You're my sisters. God says, I've adopted you.

I've made you one of my own. Now, we need to hear this. We need to hear it because we have too much of the younger son in us. The younger son, he goes off to a far country.

[17:51] He goes off worshiping other gods, seeking pleasure, seeking something else, because in his heart, he doesn't know if the father has his best. And he doesn't think his father has his best at heart.

And so he goes off and he comes to find out that none of these things love me like my father. And that's how it is for us. But we have too much of that younger son in us. We don't believe his ways are best.

That his ways are for our good. Or we have too much of the older son in us. You remember what he said. All these years, I've been slaving for you.

We turn God's service into slavery. God never meant for our service to be slavery to us. And yet that's what our hearts do.

Because we, again, we don't believe that he has our best interest at heart. We're suspicious of him. And in either case, tonight in the supper, God says to you, no, you are my son.

[18:58] And all that I have is yours. If God shares his very best with you, if he gives us his son, how will he not along with him give us everything else?

If he's already gone over the top, he's sent his son to die in our place, how will he not also give us everything that we need?

And so we're friends. We're family. And that's what the supper says to us. And then thirdly, it says rejoice. Rejoice. Now, the meal at the end of this covenant-making process, it had symbolic importance.

It showed that we're together. A new relationship has come into being. But it was also an opportunity to celebrate those promises. Like we talked about the newly married couple.

It's an opportunity when we go down to the fellowship hall or we go to a reception to celebrate the promises made, the new relationship. And tonight is an opportunity for us to celebrate God's promises to us that he's made in the new covenant.

[20:13] So, what are those promises? Well, before we talk about that, we need to talk about rejoicing and being solemn.

It is an opportunity to rejoice tonight. But, it is a solemn joy. If we don't get to the joy, that leaves some of the biblical picture out.

We're not going as far as the Bible would have us to go. Now, there's a lot going on in the Lord's Supper. There's a lot to think about. There's a lot going on.

So, we think about our sin. We think about ourselves and our condition and what we have done that Jesus had to die for us. We think about how bad I must be that the only way that I can escape the wrath of God is for His Son to die.

For His Son to suffer. And we think about that. And that should make us solemn. We think about the greatness of Christ's suffering. We've talked in the past of the physical suffering.

[21:30] The mental, the emotional suffering. The spiritual suffering of being cut off from God. It brings us into these depths of mystery where God the Father and God the Son who were forever one are now somehow divided over my sin.

That my sin is so bad that I can in some way bring disunity to the Trinity in a way that we can't understand.

In a way that's mysterious. and it is solemn but it's not a joyless solemnity. Because now is a gracious opportunity to go from our sin and from the suffering of Jesus Christ. Not leaving those things behind. Not forgetting them. But adding to them what has come upon us. How the relationship has changed because of what Christ has suffered.

And so what is promised to us in the new covenant? We've said that his death seals and guarantees and ratifies and confirms the new covenant. So what is promised to us?

[22:42] God says I will put my law in your hearts. I will put my law into your hearts. I will write it there. Now what does that mean?

He's saying I'm going to take your heart and make it like my heart. the law is a reflection of God's heart. And God is saying I'm going to write that same law into your heart.

And so the things that I love the things that I want my sense of justice my sense of holiness my sense of righteousness I'm going to make that so that's what you feel that's what you want I'm going to make you like me.

that's a glorious and an amazing promise. And if you think about it our hopes of sanctification our hopes of holiness we can say wow God we can take that promise and pray it back to the Lord.

You've said you would make me love these things make me love them what a promise. And Ezekiel he says I'm going to pour out my spirit on you. My spirit spirit of love the spirit of God's own spirit.

[24:00] So my life into you. Christianity is not just rules made by men it's not just customs it is the life of God and the souls of men.

That's intimacy and that's grace and that's what we remember and we cherish tonight that's a promise that we have. He says you will all know me they'll all know me.

Now the old covenant community was a divided community. So one neighbor on one side knew the Lord loved the Lord obeyed worshiped the Lord the neighbor on the other side still part of Israel still in the covenant community did not know the Lord did not love his ways it was a house divided and the new covenant though is not like that he says you'll all know me so where it was once divided now there's unity we all know the Lord we've all come into that relationship where he is our father and we say our father in heaven we say it together we're united we're bound together we were all blind but now we all see why why has he brought this unity to us because he has kept his promise because Jesus Christ died that we might be one he's one for us this greatest of all promises to know God to know

God not just intellectually but to know him in our hearts to the place where we trust him to be friends with God to experience his grace and his presence in our life to know him to know him in increasing measures until Paul says we will know him as we are known he says I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sins no more this meal does not accomplish our forgiveness now I hope and I trust that everyone here knows that by taking this meal you not in one iota one jaw or tittle wipe away any of your sins does not accomplish your forgiveness in any way but it does say at 150 decibels you are forgiven the promises are true you can count on them your sins

I will never count against you I will cast them in the far the sea deeper than he says I will remember them no more never bring them up against you can you imagine what kind of privilege and promise that will be when you are standing in his presence and he says I have nothing against you I find nothing against you that's what he's promising here and so we have to rejoice even as we think about our sin and we think about his suffering we have to rejoice because his sin accomplished for us these great promises this is our relationship with God through Christ things used to be so different you can't help but rejoice once you think about where you started off what you deserved we were all wrecks

[27:36] We were ruins! we were sitting in darkness we saw it this morning without hope without God all we had to look forward to was a fearful expectation of the wrath to come that's where we started off but then Jesus the mediator of the new covenant came and he totally changed everything for you totally changed your situation and he sealed that new covenant in his blood and now a relationship a permanent relationship of love and friendship and peace and mercy and grace has been made and Jesus died to give you these promises if someone sacrifices so much to give you a gift isn't it right to say thank you isn't it right to rejoice in what he's been what he gives you but before he left he said do this until I return do this until I return why why if not because we need it why if not because this is for our comfort and for our joy this is for our help and holiness if he loves us if he loves us with all of his heart and he loves us enough to lay down his life would he tell us something that is unnecessary would he tell us something that is not out of his loving heart this is

for our good and he wants us to he wants to do us good tonight by remembering and by sealing and by saying these things are true believe them and so

Christian come tonight come and see the gospel feel the gospel taste smell the physicality of it all is meant to impress you the physicality of the Lord supper is to move us to to show us in a different way God's love God's grace God's provision in Christ for you it's medicine for the sick it's solace for sinners it's alms for the poor and you if you haven't come to Christ and you are sin sick things have changed in your heart and you realize you're not right with God and sin has become nasty to you and you're feeling the burden of your sin you're feeling the guilt of it all and you've seen that God is holy and you have seen that you're not you're one of those wrecks and those ruins that I talked about where you look for life and there's no life and you look for light and there's no light there's just bitterness and shame if you have seen that then don't come to the table it's not for you yet go straight to Christ in prayer go straight to Christ in prayer even now because he's life he's forgiveness he's righteousness he's everything that you need and so if you come to him and you take him and you quit your gummings and goings and you quit your ideas about what you're going to do to fix yourself and you come empty handed naked come to thee for dress helpless look to thee for grace you come to Christ like that and that's what you need and that's all you need to be saved you come as you are and he will save you that's his word and faith is taking someone at their word it's just taking them at their word it's doing what they say because they said so and you believe that what they say is right and what they say they will do and so don't come to the table but come to Christ you could your life could be totally different after this sins behind you glory in front of you if you will come well may

God bless us God bless us with a sense of the presence of Christ as we eat tonight as we drink tonight may God bless us with a sense of his presence by the spirit and may we enjoy Christ in the table amen