



We are in an unprecedented time, aren't we? I'm no historian or infectious disease expert or global economist...but from everything I'm reading: we are part of an unprecedented event.

And quite frankly: **It's causing people to respond in unprecedented ways, as people are concerned, anxious, and stressed out.** For instance a couple days ago a friend of mine shared on Facebook about someone's experience at Costco. The person writes: "Well, I finally lost it! I was just in Costco. I saw a man whose cart was FULL to the brim with hand sanitizers, baby wipes, soaps, TP; everything that people really need! I told him I thought he was unbelievably selfish for hoarding when the elderly, and people with underlying health conditions, and lots of other people need these types of things. I told him he should be completely ashamed of himself! He then replied: 'Are you done? Because I really need to get back to stocking the shelves now...'"

See? People responding in unprecedented ways. So...we are in a historic moment. It's probably not the sort of unprecedented historic event you really wanted to be a part of right? Well, as we continue our sermon series on an introduction to the depth of Jesus – and beginning two weeks ago, and going through Easter we are zeroing in on his last week of life...as we continue to dive deep: **Today we see a different kind of unprecedented event that speaks to us in the midst of our own unprecedented event.** And what we're looking at today was not a pandemic...it wasn't even a public event. In fact, it was a private gathering around a table for a celebratory meal where social distancing was *not* practiced. So if you have a Bible, I invite you to turn Luke 22:14-23; you can also just follow along on the screen, as I read **Luke 22:14-23.**

So, while this was not a public meal, the larger context is very public, and very historic. This meal is the Passover festival. It is one of a few annual Jewish festivals, and Jerusalem was *the* place to be for it. People from all over Israel would come to Jerusalem for the week-long celebration of the

Passover. Passover is all about commemorating what took place about 1500 years before Jesus lived, when through Moses, God brought the Hebrew people out of Egypt where they'd been slave labor for at least a few generations of people, and maybe for a few hundred years.

And just before their flight from Egypt were several plagues that struck Egypt that God brought about, to convince Pharaoh to let God's people go. And the final plague was the death of first-born males in the land. But the Hebrews marked the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a lamb, and were spared the plague of death. After this last plague, Pharaoh finally relented to the request to let God's people go, that Moses kept singing to him. Yes, Moses sang his request to Pharaoh, didn't you know this? "Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Ohhhh, let my people go." Ok...he didn't sing it. But that was the refrain he brought to Pharaoh over and over. So Pharaoh finally relented – though after the Hebrews started to leave, which they did in quite a rush, he changed his mind and chased after them with his military, which did not end well for the Egyptian army. But the Hebrews made it out in a rush, finally free from their generational slavery to the Egyptians.

That all took place about 1500 years before what we read. And understanding that is crucial to understanding this passage, because: **The Passover festival (also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread) commemorates and celebrates what God did in bringing the Hebrew people out of Egypt and into freedom.** It's a celebration of God delivering them into freedom.

So this festival is a huge deal, with worship, meals, family gatherings...the whole nine yards. They celebrated it in homes every year, and had for the previous 1500 years. So it's like part 4th of July – celebrating freedom – and part Super Bowl parade in terms of the crowds of people. Many of you will remember when the Seahawks won the Super Bowl it felt like the entire Puget Sound region – and beyond – came into Seattle for the victory parade a few days later. And actually, it's part Super Bowl victory parade, part 4th of July, and part Spring Break because it lasts for a week. So Jesus is with his disciples together in Jerusalem, to eat this Passover meal.

One last thing that sets the table for this passage: **Every year for the**

previous 1500 years, this Passover meal would be done the same way.

They say the same things (scripted), they eat the same food, drink the same drinks, have the same rituals. So this is part Super Bowl parade celebration, part 4th of July, part Spring Break, and now we see it's also part Thanksgiving. Every Thanksgiving, we eat the same thing each year and engage in the same rituals every year: we eat turkey and mashed potatoes, we have glass of wine or sparkling cider...and then we have the annual rituals of talking with our friends and family about what we're thankful for, and watching football...or playing board games...or whatever your traditions are. And it's the same for them: food, drinks, and rituals are all repeated every year. And it's all in the context of their faith: giving thanks and praise to God for his freeing work in their ancestors' lives and their own lives still to that day. It all points to God.

So that's the big picture, and helps us understand the importance and meaning of this meal. Now, let's zoom in and focus on Jesus and the 12 disciples. Because here, Jesus says something that was completely unprecedented in the 1500-year history of the Passover. He takes the unleavened bread, and as he hands it out to them he says, **“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19)**. Let's stop right there for a moment. Do you see how this is not going according to script? Jesus is saying that the bread of the Passover meal, where they remember what *God* has done and the freedom that *God* brought them into...Jesus is saying that *that bread* now represents *him* and he wants his disciple to partake of it, whenever they do so in the future from this time forward, in remembrance of *him*.

Then it continues with the wine. Before handing out the bread, Jesus had them pass around a cup and pour their own little cup of wine out of the one big cup. Then when it comes time in the Passover meal to drink this wine, Jesus says, **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20)**. This would be stunning, shocking and unprecedented. Not that that would be anything new to the 12 disciples. Jesus said and did things all the time that undoubtedly surprised them. But up until this point in his three years of ministry with them, this probably caps them all.

But: Do you see what's going on here? Jesus is taking these symbols of the freedom that *God provided* centuries earlier and appropriates them to *himself*, and tells them to do this in remembrance of *Him* and of what he's doing for them right now and through his death on the cross. He's telling them that now He, through His broken body and shed blood, is providing the freedom that they need...It's not just the freedom from Egypt that they're commemorating, it's about a present and future freedom that comes through his death on the cross.

The key thing here that sets this up is that the elements of this meal already have *huge* spiritual significance. This isn't Jesus sitting down to an everyday meal like a plate of spaghetti and garlic bread with a bottle of "three buck chuck" from Trader Joe's while watching a movie on Netflix while face-timing his buddies because of social distancing rules. This is an intimate, spiritually-loaded event, and Jesus is taking the bread and the wine, which is also symbolized by the cup that he holds...he's taking these holy elements that for 1500 years have pointed people to God, and **Jesus is taking these holy elements and saying "From now on, they point you to me, and a new covenant that is through me."**

It's a clear claim to equating himself with God. Now, Jesus makes many claims to divinity throughout the gospels; this is just one. But this is arguably his most direct way of stating it. And Jesus' claim of equality to God is what most people have the hardest time accepting. Many people will agree and have agreed over the centuries that Jesus was a good man, a great teacher of morals and of spirituality and so forth. But can Jesus be a good teacher, a moral teacher, and make false claims about himself? If he's lying about who he is and setting himself up as more grandiose than he actually is...if he is over-promising and under-delivering...is he really a good and moral teacher?

C.S. Lewis has written maybe the most profound thing about this. He writes, **"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things**

Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice...let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

Lewis hits the nail on the head. Either Jesus is who he says he is; or he's not a good person at all. He'd be a fraud and a cheat and even a lunatic, as Lewis says. Jesus doesn't give us room for any middle ground to say he's a good teacher, but not fully who he claims to be. And this Passover meal, because of the unprecedented things Jesus says, drives the point home.

And all of this matters because of this new covenant that Jesus speaks of. It builds on the Old Covenant that we read about in different places in the Old Testament, but with Jesus doing our part. Jesus is the priest who mediates between us and our Heavenly Father; Jesus is the sacrifice to atone for our sin, his blood is painted on the doorposts of our lives. And through that, Jesus does for us what we could never do ourselves: bring us into a right relationship with God our Heavenly Father. That's the freedom he offers. That's what the bread and the cup symbolize and point us to and help us remember: That Jesus upholds our side of the covenant with God on our behalf. There is amazing freedom in that when we believe.

This is all incredibly good news, because we know that **Jesus is with us in the midst of life, while at the same time being over and above it all.** He's not angry at us shaking a finger at us and punishing us with coronavirus or any other tragedy that might come our way. On the cross, Jesus has taken our punishment for our sin and our waywardness from God, and all who believe in that will benefit from it. But sin still exists and we still suffer the consequences of it here in this life – and that includes sickness. And so Jesus is with you in the midst of a pandemic; Jesus is with you in the midst of a job loss; Jesus is with you in the midst of uncertainty; Jesus is with you in the midst of the death of a loved one; Jesus is with you in the midst of divorce. Jesus is with you in your grief.

Jesus is the very presence of God with you, in the midst of whatever

you're going through. He's been through it all himself; he wept when his friend Lazarus died; he got angry when people treated others wrongly; he was attacked and criticized; he suffered unjustly when he was put up on the cross. So he knows the pain that we go through. And he's intentionally disobeying social distancing rules with you right now, if you will only open your mind and heart up to the reality of his presence through His Spirit, and believe. Jesus is with you.

And: Jesus is also over and above all of Creation – including the current situation. He transcends everything. Jesus sees the bigger picture, beyond time, that you and I cannot even begin to comprehend. He is Lord of creation. As John 1 says, all things were made through Him. Even more than that: He's got all of time in his hands, from the beginning to the end, and beyond into eternity. He is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, who spoke creation into being, who sustains all of life now and forever more. So he's in the midst of things with us, but he's over and above it all, able to transcend it all, and to help us to do the same – even death has been transcended by Jesus.

So, in this unprecedented moment in history, let:

The unprecedented *covenant* of Jesus,

The unprecedented *presence* of Jesus, and

The unprecedented *divinity* of Jesus

bring you hope, comfort, and peace, today and always.

May the simple, common elements of the bread and the cup be regular reminders that Jesus' body was broken for you and his blood poured out for you. May they remind you of everything that Jesus is, and all that he's done for you. And may you and I especially remember that unprecedented gift in unprecedented times like this. Let's pray...Amen.