

## Lent course for St. Helen's Church Cliffe

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2026

### This Cup

**Aim:** during these five weeks in Lent, we will start to look at the origins of the Passover Meal and how Jesus might have shared this with his disciples on Maundy Thursday. We will clearly see that the meal we call the Last Supper looked very different from what we do at Communion over two thousand years later, a communion that has been shaped by the church through different traditions and simplified. The course aims to look at the practical reason for so many cups within the Passover meal. It will also look at how Jesus fulfilled a new Passover becoming the sacrificial lamb, changing the tradition by being all the elements of the original Passover.

**I want to argue that it was the wine that was shared and not the cup and that in this we have changed the central focus of communion by the element that delivers wine rather than the produce and symbol of suffering.**

**Week One: 25<sup>th</sup> February:** The first cup, the cup of sanctification, **the Kiddush cup**. The preparation for the start of the meal.

**Week Two: 4<sup>th</sup> March:** The second cup, the cup of proclamation, **the Haggadah cup**, the start of the historical story of the Passover.

**Week Three: 11<sup>th</sup> March:** The third cup, the cup of blessing, **the Berakah cup**, the meal is had.

**Week Four: 18<sup>th</sup> March:** The fourth cup, the cup of praise, **the Hallel cup**, final toast to end the meal.

**Week Five: 25<sup>th</sup> March: The fifth cup Elijah's cup:** Our cup given to us by Christ, the thanksgiving cup which translates as *eucharistia*.

### Week One

#### The Kiddush Cup

The first cup, the cup of sanctification, the preparation for the start of the meal.

#### Opening time of worship and prayer

##### Introduction: *Pre-reading*

Over the next five weeks we will be looking at the original and modern traditions around the Jewish celebration of the Passover. On Maundy Thursday we will gather together and share a Seder Meal ending with a simple act of Communion.

The Eucharist, Holy Communion has become central to the Christian faith, it has been shaped and shared in many different ways over the centuries ever since Paul gave it the structure it has come to base itself on after the early Christians in Corinth abused its Passover roots.

It might be that you have a deep theology and understanding as to why and how we do or come to share communion. It is more likely you have just accepted what the church has presented to you without question, missing out on its deep roots that go right back to Moses.

I grew up for instance in a low evangelical Anglican tradition where we only received communion once a month at the main family service, it was offered at morning and evening services on other Sundays to make sure that as Canon Law demands it is available at least once in every benefice. For many years at the beginning of our marriage we worshiped in the Baptist Church where communion was an important part of our faith yet not central, again only celebrated once a month without all the liturgy we have in the Anglican church, also though we used real bread, alcohol is not permitted in Baptist chapels, so we drank red grape juice from individual cups. When we came back to the C of E we attended a higher tradition where communion was now central to worship and offered at every main service. In curacy the tradition went higher still, with many believing that they needed communion to be the most important part of worship and of their faith, you could strip away every other element of worship as long as communion was shared.

As an evangelical I have struggled with this notion because God's word through Jesus and the gift of His Spirit are what I deem to be central to my faith and worship, only when we understand God's word deeper can Communion begin to have a deeper relevance and is not something we just do and receive but becomes a statement of God's love and our love in return for all that Jesus has done for us. It is less tradition and more relationship, it is not how but why, because Jesus invites us to sit and eat with him. Our communion has stripped away the fellowship of sharing a meal together and left us with just a token of what was first shared at that table in the upper room, we have lost somewhere along the line I believe, the Passover. Hopefully over the next few weeks we might start to gain a sense of the real depth of that meal once again or for the first time and why Jesus could only give us communion through the Passover, no over meal would have sufficed.

It wasn't until at theological college that I came across the fundamental roots of our communion that I started to broaden my understanding of what happens when we come to the communion table. Our chef (Henry) was a Messianic Jew<sup>1</sup> and he laid on a Seder Meal for us (Lamb Shank wonderful). I had been to one before but not like this. Suddenly even though it had Christian elements to it, it was a demonstration of how Jesus shared his last meal on earth with his friends celebrating the Passover, it's what Jews do and Jesus was a Jew. It is a meal completely set around custom and tradition remembering how God saved his people on that last night in Egypt as all the first born of Egypt died that night causing Pharaoh to release the Hebrew slaves from captivity. (note that's all they were at this time Hebrew slaves descended from Jacob and his twelve sons, though Jacob is called Israel they were not at this stage a nation, simply the descendants of Israel/Jacob)

What Jesus was about to react through himself was a new Passover, he was about to fulfil the whole Law, he was about to bring true all that the prophets had said would happen and if we stop long enough to examine the evidence found in our four gospel accounts we might just start to come to communion with a better understanding of its real significance in God's plan for all of humanity. It will take just four cups to explain what was happening on that last night in Jerusalem for Jesus and for us; and at this stage all we need to understand is that Jesus did everything that he did because of love.

***I hope we are now ready to be detectives and open to believe the evidence and prepared to make our own conclusions guided by God's Holy Spirit.***

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<sup>1</sup> Google AI: A Messianic Jew is a person of Jewish ethnicity and culture who believes Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) is the promised Messiah, integrating their Jewish identity with faith in Jesus, often observing Jewish traditions like Shabbat and holidays but viewing salvation through Jesus, distinguishing themselves from mainstream Judaism and Christianity, which typically don't recognize them as fully Jewish or Christian, respectively.

## Where do we start?

We start our course; by looking at what Jesus instructed his disciples to do or get ready on that first Maundy Thursday.

### Mark 14: 12-16

#### Preparations

*12 On the first day of the Festival 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?"*

*13 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. 14 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?' 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."*

*16 The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So, they prepared the Passover.*

Here we have Mark's account of the events that led to the Last Supper and so begins our detective work.

First it is the time of the Passover, Jerusalem would have been packed with Jewish pilgrims, lodgings and rooms would have been in short supply, that is why Jesus is probably staying outside the city in Bethany.

- Do you think Jesus had already booked a room for this meal?

It's not a small venue it is a large room it came at a premium unless Jesus knew the owner.

- Why might he have known the owner?
- Did the disciples have any idea where it was?

Who were the two disciples Jesus instructed to prepare the feast. Well, if we want to know the answer as Mark does not tell us we need to look at Luke's account of the events. Luke put his gospel together by searching out firsthand evidence through witnesses. Luke 22: 8 it was Peter and John. According to Matthew it might have been all twelve disciples or more, Matthew 26:17 What we quickly note is that John's gospel has no direct account of the physical actions of the Last Supper. John records, it is just before Jesus's time to depart this world that they sat down at the time of Passover and were served a meal. John 13 it is interesting that they are served a meal as this would imply others were present at the Passover meal. It was common practice for women to serve the meals and certainly women play a key role in the Passover traditions. Many scholars believe that there was a much bigger crowd at that last meal than just the 12 apostles, the evidence in Mark might suggest this as we are told they shared the meal in a large room. Note Mark as well says that Jesus requests that he eats this meal with his disciples, there is no suggestion of it being just 12 only that the twelve were also present. You see Jesus had many disciples Luke 10: 1, 72 other disciples are sent out.

- Is this important, does it make any difference?

Maybe you can see that this last meal is recorded slightly differently in the four gospels, yet it begins to give us a bigger picture of events as we compare each account. What we know for sure is it is the time of Passover, a meal Jesus traditionally partook of, he had been to Jerusalem before to celebrate the

Passover interestingly according to John possibly four times, like the cups we will be looking at, can we find a theological connection?

1<sup>st</sup> time John 2:13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (*Jesus clears the temple for the first time just after turning water into **wine!***)

2<sup>nd</sup> time John 5:1 After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (*Jesus was in the middle of his **healing** ministry*)

3<sup>rd</sup> time John 6:4 Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. (*Jesus fed 5000+ with **bread** and fish*)

4<sup>th</sup> time John 13: 1 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (*Jesus must face **death***)

Note that John records how dangerous it was for Jesus to enter Jerusalem on this fourth occasion. 11: 55-57, *Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. 56 They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?' 57 Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.*

What we are beginning to see is that Jesus knew how dangerous it was for himself to be seen in Jerusalem and yet he clearly comes and goes in and out of the city during the time of Passover. In someway it was an easy place to hide because of the huge amounts of Jewish pilgrims that would have been present. At the time of Passover, the population of Jerusalem went up by at least 10 times, space was limited in the narrow streets. The historian Flavius Josephus<sup>2</sup> says 2.5 million would be found at the time of the Passover in Jerusalem. Most modern historians believe that he over exaggerated probably a tenth of that but still in ancient times huge crowds.

The scene is now set, the preparation for Jesus's final meal has been met and so now we as it were join him at the Passover table as we now look at the first cup of four that must be part of a strict practice observed by all Jews.

We must assume that Jesus observed the law, after all he himself claimed that he did not come to break the law but fulfil it. (Matthew 5: 17) Now as we strip away the elements of this Passover meal we might just see how he did this.

Why four cups, well it was the law, it was traditional and we find the evidence we need for this in what the Jews call the Mishnah. The Mishnah is a collection of laws that were collected from various Rabbi's in the second century AD. Just like our gospels and the Old Testament Jewish tradition for sharing scripture, laws and religious practices was taught via and oral fashion, one generation simply repeating said information and stories to another. After the destruction the temple in 70AD both Jews and Christians found persecution at the hands of the Roman empire, fearing that many of the laws and stories might be lost forever, they choose to write them down and record them for future generations.

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<sup>2</sup> The Jewish Wars 6.9.3 (**Alternative Estimates:** Scholars often estimate a more realistic attendance figure to be in the region of 300,000 to 500,000 people.)

What we find in the Mishnah are many of the laws that Jesus faced and argued against whilst he lived here on earth. In the midst of these are very detailed rules for observing and celebrating the Passover. If those who prepared that final meal for Jesus did so in the full traditional manner then this is what they laid out on that table on that last night. These are still observed in the Passover meal today and for those who will partake in our seder meal this year you will see and experience this.

For the purpose of this course, I am only interested in the tradition of sharing wine and the cups used for it. In the Mishnah under section Pesahim 10:1 C (Hebrew for Passovers) it instructs the host to provide four cups for the meal for each person, no fewer and the cost should not prohibit this 10:1 D. Given that Jesus had at least 13 of them sat in that room that's a lot of cups 52, if you like playing with numbers one for every week of the year. The real point here is that Jesus had a lot of cups to choose from and there needed to be enough wine on tap as there was a minimum amount poured out in each vessel throughout the meal. (each serving should be at least 112ml so that's approximately 6 standard bottles of wine for 13 people) In fact it could/can be watered down with water or fruit juice to stop intoxication. You can see water added to wine during our communions, there is a whole crazy theology on why we do this, the real truth is because that is what happened in the Passover to stop them getting drunk. Immediately you might start to ask did Jesus pick just one cup to share with those around the table, if so why, it wasn't traditional and if so which one, they were ceremonial cups and so most likely all the same.

We will look at each of the four cups that each person drank from and why over the next few weeks, but note this, this meal is a reminder of the time God set His people free from Slavery back at the time of Moses. The cups represent the following promises of God:<sup>3</sup> Exodus 6: 6-7

1. I WILL bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. (Sanctification)
2. I WILL free you from being slaves. (Affliction)
3. I WILL redeem you with an outstretched arm. (Redemption)
4. I WILL take you as My own people (Praise)

**Pause for thought:** Jesus could have chosen any time to submit to the authorities as he had a price on his head, he could have avoided his arrest and possibly his death. But for some reason Jesus chooses the Passover to be the time when he shared his last meal on earth, why; was he becoming the new Passover, the new sacrificial lamb, why was it such an important meal. ***We do need to remember that this is still the Passover it is not what we consider to be communion.***

### **The first cup**

The first cup is known as the Kiddush cup the same cup is used at Shabbat meals, the word Kiddush simply means making Holy. When this cup is raised it symbolises the start of a Holy Meal, a Holy celebration. It sets the meal apart from other meals as the sabbath, the shabbat is set aside as a day of rest. This cup of the first fruit is a bit like a starter, like having a sherry before a meal or the welcoming drink at a wedding reception.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theancientway.org/articles/what-do-the-four-cups-of-wine-represent-at-passover> this link gives a good insight to the use of four cups and what they represent in the Passover. Accessed 20/01/2026

At the time of Jesus there were two traditions observed by the Rabbis the first was a blessing over the house in which the meal was to take place and the second over the wine to be used in the Passover. The other tradition was simply the other way round.

- As Jesus was seen as a Rabbi would it be likely that he began the Passover with one of these blessings?

In Luke's accounts Jesus uses two cups the first is likely the second cup of the Passover as he begins the Passover meal, we will look deeper at this next week and the week after at the third cup accounted for in Luke. It is not a mistake in Luke's account that two cups are used, it was just part of this four-cup order. When Jesus lifts the second cup the Passover meal has not yet been shared.<sup>4</sup> In the absence of a Rabbi it would be the father of the family that raised this toast and blessing, breaking bread before they all dug in to the main meal.

According to the Mishnah the set blessing was this:

'Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe,  
who creates the fruit of the vine.'<sup>5</sup>

What can we compare this to today in our Christian traditions, well saying grace at the start of a meal. Once a blessing or grace was said, the food could be enjoyed. The tradition before the collapse of the temple was to have lamb served, in later times chicken was accepted as long as a lamb shank bone was presented to represent the whole lamb. The lamb was called the 'guph' which in Hebrew means 'the body, a corpse.' Even though the lamb was presented the meal proper was not yet started.

- What might you already start to see as being similar to the communion we share today?

After the first cup had been raised you could start to drink from it as other Passover traditions were now observed, it was the same with the second cup but not the third. The main feature of the meal was bread which is highly symbolic throughout the rest of the meal. The bread had to be unleavened, that is made with no yeast or raising agents.

At this stage we need to be clear that the Passover was a meal that was observed to give God thanks for the exodus from Egypt of God's people at the time of Moses. We will dig a little deeper over the next few weeks as to why. If you want a little homework over the next week you may wish to read Exodus 12: 1-30 then 43 -end & chapter 13: 1-16. What you will see immediately is that wine is not mentioned in this Passover, what is described is blood, wine then becomes the simple symbol for blood.

- At this early stage I want to then ask if it is blood/wine that is the core of the Passover; why have we focussed on the cups that we present that symbol in as being central?

That first cup the Kiddush cup is all about a story, a story that will be told through the next three cups, it introduces the story of the exodus, a story of salvation, God saves His children, the first born on the night of the Passover and through the mighty waters of the dead sea.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 22: 14 When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. 15 He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' 17 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'

<sup>5</sup> Mishnah: Berakoth 6:1

We have now come to the end of week one, we have as it were raised the first cup, we have begun the story of a new salvation where Jesus saves us.

- Any further questions at this stage?

End with a time of worship and prayer.

## **Week two**

The second cup, the cup of proclamation, **the Haggadah cup**, the start of the historical story of the Passover. A time of affliction.

### **Opening time of worship and prayer**

Last week I left you with some reading to look at when you got home, the story of Moses and the last plague, the one plague that would rip Egypt apart and push Pharaoh to let the Hebrew slaves go. This was the time of Moses a time when God delivered His people from the affliction of slavery that they had endured for 430 years (Exodus 12: 40). Is it any wonder that as God began to show how he would keep His promise to Abraham that there was a huge celebration that would first occur on the night before they set off from Egypt and then in the consequent years. The second cup shared at the Passover meal represents that promise, 'I WILL free you from being slaves.' The name it is given is Haggadah in Hebrew, meaning, telling, recounting, setting a narrative.

Again, last week I suggested that the first cup that Jesus raised in his telling of the accounts of the Last Super was in fact this second cup of the Passover. Jesus is now going to describe how at the time of Moses God set His people free and how God was about to do it again with a new sacrificial lamb, His son Jesus. There comes at this point in the meal an explanation of the different foods laid before them, they all have relevance to the Exodus.

Passover the name of the meal then refers to the night God passed over the houses of the Israelites sparing their first born.

Unleavened bread is focussed on heavily as there wasn't time to allow normal bread to rise.

Bitter herbs are used as a reminder of the bitterness they endured as slaves to Egypt.

During this time, the guests are reminded about the ten plagues and how God is mightier than the many gods of Egypt. It also reveals a God who is willing to give us many chances, each time Pharaoh could have relented and just let the slaves go but he doesn't God does not just bring down his wrath in the first instance he gives them further opportunity to act before the last dreaded plague.

Let's look a little deeper at Exodus 12, back in chapter 11 God had revealed His intentions, for by delivering the 10<sup>th</sup> and last plague every first-born person and animal would die including Pharaoh's own son. God was going to show that there was a difference between Egyptians and Israelites for as long as the Israelites obey and followed God's strict instruction for their meal and their homes that night they would be spared as God hovered over the land at around midnight.

- At this point what if anything do you make of all this?
- Why were the meal and instructions so precise?

### **The instructions for the first Passover meal:**

The whole community of Israel must share a meal.

Each man (head of each household) must take a lamb.

The lamb must be a year old, a male lamb.

The lamb must have no defects. It must not have any broken bones.

It can be a sheep or a goat.

Look after the lamb for four days the on that day at twilight everyone of them must be slaughtered.

Take some of the lambs blood and paint it on the sides and tops of every Hebrew doorframe, each house where the lamb will be eaten. In verse 22 you will note it is to be applied on a hyssop stick. Hyssop was seen as bringing purification and was used for cleansing people with leprosy<sup>6</sup>. \* *We will come back to this shortly as it links with Jesus's crucifixion.*

That same night eat the lamb, it must be roasted on an open fire accompanied with bitter herbs.

Bread must be baked and consumed without yeast.

Every part of the lamb must be eaten including the head and inner parts.

Any left must be burnt without trace.

Eat it with your cloak on, tucked into your belt and wearing your sandals, holding a staff in one hand, eat it quickly.

Do not leave your house at anytime during the night.

- Why do you think they had to be dressed as they were for that meal?

What comes next in the Exodus account is the instruction to replicate this meal every year as a celebrated festival, every generation should observe it. The festival starts with the removal of yeast from every home as for the next seven days unleavened bread only will be consumed. On day one and day seven of the festival you must not work and gather together, you may prepare food for celebrating. When the meal is shared in future generations the story of the first Passover must be told to all, especially children.

In ancient times stories were recorded in what we call an oral fashion and by repetition. The bible we have today was only put together in written form at relatively late periods of our human history. Some of the first manuscripts appearing just 1500 years before Christ but most of it not until 500- 300 years BC. Our gospels where not written till 60 years or so after Jesus and the whole collection we know today not put together till around 393 AD. When we read the OT today it might seem that there is a lot of repetition that is simply due to the way in which it was told around campfires and homes. As we might accept there were some variations from place to place on how those stories were told, what we have today are the most common trends gathered from the many ancient manuscripts. This is why Moses instructed the Israelites never to forget or stop telling their children what God did for them in Egypt that night as the Passover tradition was born.

- Just pause for a moment and think about your own stories, those of your grandparents, how do you record, retell and share them. Is it important that we do?

When Jesus met in that upper room he was recalling what God had done for them up to that moment, what was about to change was Jesus was going to demonstrate that God hadn't finished His plan because Jesus himself was about to become the new Passover, which will be demonstrated by the next two cups of the Passover meal. Things were about to change; a new chapter was being written. That might not be so surprising because things had changed before, the very way in which the Passover meal

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<sup>6</sup> Leviticus 14

was celebrated at the time of Jesus was different from how the first and subsequent Passovers were shared at the time of Moses.

For this we need to return to the Mishnah and look at the difference.

### **Outline instructions for the Passover meal at the time of Jesus.**

The first requirement was that all leaven was sought out and removed by candle light, there then follows pages of instruction as to what to do with the leaven bread as not to waste it, such as feeding it to the dogs.

- Can you think of a time when this is referred to in Jesus's ministry?

Space is made for wine in the vaults.

- Again, can you think of a time when Jesus made sure there was enough wine?

Herbs are bought for the meal they can be, Lettuce, chicory, pepperwort, endives, dandelion fresh or dried. They cannot be pickled or cooked.

Women are to remove all makeup.

It is the women's role, three of them to prepare the bread for the meal.

An unblemished, no older than a year male lamb is slaughtered which can only be used for the Passover meal.

The lamb is slaughtered by the Temple Priests and its blood tossed at the altar; this is repeated for all who require a Passover Lamb. (SEE NOTE A BELOW)

The carcasses are flayed out on wooden hooks; metal spits were not permitted (these were wooden stakes that looked as though the lambs had been crucified.)

A cup is filled with the blood of the lamb before being tossed.

Only when it was dark could the lamb then be roasted.

Any bones or scraps leftover must be burnt to nothing.

If a bone is broken of the Passover Lamb the person who breaks it receives forty stripes.

The meal can only be eaten in the hours of darkness.

There must be no fewer than four cups of wine provided for each person including the poor, funds should be made through charity for this purpose.

- What if any differences do you note about this Passover known as the Jerusalem Passover and the first Passover referred to as the Egyptian Passover?

The main difference might be less obvious but the first Passover and until the time of Solomon and the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem were celebrated in the homes of the Israelites. From Solomon till the destruction of the Temple in 70AD the main celebration of the Passover was carried out by the High Priest and other priests in Jerusalem. Obviously there were times when Israel was in exile, so the Passover had to be shared in homes again in Babylon but after the Jewish return and by the time Jesus enters the scene it was just Jerusalem. After 70AD till this very day the Passover is once again celebrated in homes.

There was another difference that developed in Jewish history we won't look at this now but come back to it in week five. The Passover had been about the redemption of God's people from slavery in Egypt but as the prophets started to preach there became an expectancy that the Messiah would appear at the time of the Passover and save God's people for once and for all.

Jesus must have known these prophecies and so that is why he had to enter Jerusalem when he did, he knew his fate and he knew that unless he died at this time his claim to be Christ would have been diminished, everything if you like was riding on it.

What Jesus and his disciples became part of back then was very different to what we know or might experience in a Seder meal today which is the modern interpretation of the Passover meal. NOTE **A** if Josephus is right with his numbers of 2.5 million pilgrims the slaughter of lambs was beyond imagination. If as some scholars believe it was a tenth of this, it was still a huge number of lambs that were sacrificed for the Passover. A lamb could be divided between a maximum of ten people so at the smallest number approximately 25,000 lambs were slaughtered and hung out around the Temple courts, the amount of blood that was tossed onto the altar was huge, literally a blood bath and this is what Jewish pilgrims came to see. Jesus would have seen this several times throughout his life, the first recorded time when he was twelve years old where we are told his parents always attended the festival (Luke 2: 41-42). This was sacrifice on an industrial scale.

- What are your thoughts about this mass sacrifice?

Back to the second cup, Jesus in Luke's account takes this cup having said he had desired to share this Passover with them just before his own suffering. They had no idea what he meant but Jesus was acting out a new Passover step by step. With that second cup Jesus was proclaiming what he was about to do, it might seem to some that the events that unfurled that night were random, they are not because Jesus was in full control.

- What are your thoughts about how Jesus seems to be directing the actions of that night through the traditions of the Passover?

With the second cup the Father of the meal would explain the meaning of the various elements of the Passover, Jesus was doing the same, this is my blood, this is my body. Jesus was declaring that he was now the sacrificial lamb, the cup of affliction was now his.

## Week Three

The third cup, the cup of blessing, **the Berakah cup**, the meal is had.

### Opening time of worship and prayer

The word Berakah simply translates as blessing, the cup of blessing. Sticking with Luke's account to begin with Jesus breaks bread and shares it with his disciple then after the meal he takes the cup, which can only be the third cup of the Passover because this was not raised until the meal was finished. Taking the cup Jesus declares that this cup is a new covenant, it represents his blood, the same blood that is poured out over the altar from a cup in the Temple when the sacrificial Lamb is slaughtered. This cup says: 'I WILL redeem you with an outstretched arm.'

- What do you understand about the word redeem?

In Hebrew this was very significant the word is Ga'al which refers to a Kingsman redeemer, someone who buys you back from slavery. God had been that at the first Passover; He bought His people back and freed them. Now Jesus lifts this third cup and declares that he is going to pay the price for our freedom and new covenant. A freedom from what, well the bonds of sin that keep us enslaved. Jesus is saying that through his blood we will be set free, he is paying our debt.

With the pouring of wine into the third cup the meal proper began, but it is at this point probably that Jesus in John's gospel where the meal is not described in detail, that Jesus gets up and washes his disciples feet. John records in verse 2 of chapter 13 that the meal was being served, and in verse 4 he got up from the meal and took off his outer clothing to wash their feet. The next thing Jesus does after a long discourse is to dip his bread into his wine verses 26-27 this was part of the Passover tradition of the third cup, he then gives it to Judas first, identifying his betrayer. The rest of the disciples have no clue what Jesus has done, in time they would all dip their bread into the third cup as was expected in the Passover.

- Can you see how by a little cross examination of all four gospels we begin to get the whole picture of the Passover Meal that Jesus shared. Would you agree at this stage that Jesus used at least three cups up to now?

We have one last point of evidence to say that the second cup Luke records was in fact the third cup of the Passover and this comes from Paul for in 1 Corinthians 10:16 he describes the cup they use like this, '**The cup of blessing [the berakah cup]** that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? In those early days of the church their communion looked very much like a Passover meal, a Shabat meal. What was happening at that meal was those who did not understand it were pigging out before others had a chance. Paul then simplifies the whole thing to look like our communion today. Basically, eat at home before you gather and just share bread and wine with one cup, they would have likely all had a cup each but not four after this as they had been getting drunk with four cups. (Read at home 1 Corinthians 11: 17- 34) Modern communion was then born, very different from the way in which it was shared at the Last Supper. The way they had been sharing the Lord's Supper for the last twenty years as Paul's letter wasn't written till 50AD was changed it would seem forever.

Once the meal was finished a blessing was said over the third cup and its contents finished and until the fourth cup was poured no one was allowed to drink further wine. The supper was over and we will look at what happened next, next week. What we can note from Matthew and Mark is that at this point

a fourth cup was never poured, raised or drunk, the big question is why did Jesus not finish the Passover meal correctly as he seems to have observed every thing else even if he had changed its covenant meaning to point to himself rather than a sacrificial lamb. It's a big question which I will leave as a cliffhanger till next week where we pick up on the fourth cup and discover that it was present.

- Maybe over the next week you might want to consider how the fourth cup is revealed, I'm open to ideas next time we meet.

What we can note from the first Egyptian Passover is how the presence of wine became central to the Passover, it represented the one thing that could not be present at the actual Passover Meal, lamb's blood as by the time of Jesus it was prepared in the Temple courts and brought home. It represented the blood of the Lamb, the sacrificial lamb that blood was poured out as an offering to God on the altar in the Temple. It was by that lamb's blood that on the night of the Passover God could recognise the difference between Israelites and Egyptians. Back then they painted their homes in the blood, now as they shared the meal in their own homes the wine became a simple representation of that same blood, it said that through this blood we are saved, we are marked out. If we understand this then what Jesus said about the wine and the bread being symbols of his own body and blood suddenly begins to make perfect sense. As Jesus predicted his own suffering and sacrificial death he gave his disciples something they were familiar with, but this was now a new covenant, a new Passover, yes we call it communion or the Eucharist which comes from the Greek word eucharistia meaning would you believe, thanksgiving, to give thanks, to bless as in the third cup.

Jesus had changed the Passover meal and claimed it as his own, this is a huge shift, it says that as was anticipated, that the Messiah would be revealed at the time of the Passover.

- Just consider for a moment maybe discuss the true gravity of Jesus's statement, 'Do this in remembrance of me.' The Passover was meant to be in remembrance of God's actions back in Egypt. How big is this change, have you ever considered it before?

Jesus is then the new blood of the covenant God has made with us, he is in the Last Supper the New wine of God's Kingdom. Hebrews 9: 11-28 is a long read but to summarise, from the time of Moses till Jesus, blood had to be shed again and again for the atonement of our sin. Jesus ended this practice in a one in a lifetime, eternal sacrifice, his blood paid the final price for our sin. Verse 15 'For this reason Christ is the mediator of the new covenant.'

If we turn to Mark's gospel 2; 18-22 we read this, 18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, 'Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' 19 Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. *[can you see a link with the wedding at Cana here, Jesus won't, he can't let the wine run out, especially on the third day when the wedding took place]*

21 'No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 **And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.'**

The traditions of the Passover were like old wine and old wineskins, Jesus was saying that he is the new wine, his blood is the new covenant. If you agreed that he was, that he was the Messiah then as new

wine he couldn't be put in the old wine skin, he wasn't the old Passover, the two couldn't fit as one, both had to be new.

Note: also that wineskins were made from the complete hides of sheep or goats, suddenly the picture of symbolism gets bigger, the blood of the lamb is now represented by wine stored within, the two become inseparable in Jesus's new Passover.

I come finally back to my original question and search for an answer:

- I want to ask if it is blood/wine that is the core of the Passover; why have we focused on the actual cups that we present that symbol in as being central to our communion? We say there is one cup when there wasn't, but what is true is there is one blood, that blood was finally shed on a cross, the wine we share/serve is simply a reminder of that act of sacrifice. 'Do this in remembrance of me.'

## Week four

The fourth cup, the cup of praise, **the Hallel cup**, final toast to end the meal.

'I WILL take you as My own people.'

### Opening time of worship and prayer

I want to jump right in tonight and say that it is abundantly clear that Jesus never got around to sharing this fourth cup in that upper room. But as I said last week the gospels do show us that he would soon drink of it alone.

Last week I asked you to think of how he might have done this, please share any thoughts.

You see if Jesus didn't drink of the fourth cup he never actually finished the Passover meal, so if he was saying he was the new covenant that replaced the old covenant he had failed as he seemed in a rush to go out and face the cross, had he forgotten to finish the meal, or was something else transpiring that would bring closure to this new Passover, the detective work continues and it is plain to see when it is explained.

What was the fourth cup as part of the original Passover at the time of Jesus. Well, it is the Hallel cup which simply translates as praise, the cup of praise, did Jesus not share this cup because there's nothing really to praise God for in the pain of a cross.

Before the final cup is raised and drunk the tradition was to sing from the psalms, these psalms were familiar to Jesus and his disciples because the same ones are sung at every Passover, at this final point in the meal they were Psalms 115 -118. If you were celebrating the original Passover of course you would sing songs of praise for thanks for what God had done for you in freeing you from slavery.

Look at them now and see how they relate to that first Exodus.

**115** Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory,  
for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

<sup>2</sup> Why should the nations say,  
'Where is their God?'

<sup>3</sup> Our God is in the heavens;  
he does whatever he pleases.

<sup>4</sup> Their idols are silver and gold,  
the work of human hands.

<sup>5</sup> They have mouths, but do not speak;  
eyes, but do not see.

<sup>6</sup> They have ears, but do not hear;  
noses, but do not smell.

<sup>7</sup> They have hands, but do not feel;  
feet, but do not walk;  
they make no sound in their throats.

<sup>8</sup> Those who make them are like them;  
so are all who trust in them.

<sup>9</sup> O Israel, trust in the LORD!  
He is their help and their shield.

<sup>10</sup> O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD!  
He is their help and their shield.

<sup>11</sup> You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD!  
He is their help and their shield.

<sup>12</sup> The LORD has been mindful of us; he will bless us;  
he will bless the house of Israel;  
he will bless the house of Aaron;

<sup>13</sup> he will bless those who fear the LORD,  
both small and great.

<sup>14</sup> May the LORD give you increase,  
both you and your children.

<sup>15</sup> May you be blessed by the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth.

<sup>16</sup> The heavens are the LORD's heavens,  
but the earth he has given to human beings.

<sup>17</sup> The dead do not praise the LORD,  
nor do any that go down into silence.

<sup>18</sup> But we will bless the LORD  
from this time on and for evermore.  
Praise the LORD!

**116** I love the LORD, because he has heard  
my voice and my supplications.

<sup>2</sup> Because he inclined his ear to me,  
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

<sup>3</sup> **The snares of death encompassed me;  
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;  
I suffered distress and anguish.**

<sup>4</sup> Then I called on the name of the LORD:  
'O LORD, I pray, save my life!'

<sup>5</sup> Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;  
our God is merciful.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD protects the simple;  
when I was brought low, he saved me.

<sup>7</sup> Return, O my soul, to your rest,  
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

<sup>8</sup> For you have delivered my soul from death,  
my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling.

<sup>9</sup> I walk before the LORD  
in the land of the living.

<sup>10</sup> I kept my faith, even when I said,  
'I am greatly afflicted';

<sup>11</sup> I said in my consternation,  
    'Everyone is a liar.'  
<sup>12</sup> What shall I return to the LORD  
    for all his bounty to me?  
<sup>13</sup> I will lift up the cup of salvation  
    and call on the name of the LORD,  
<sup>14</sup> I will pay my vows to the LORD  
    in the presence of all his people.  
<sup>15</sup> Precious in the sight of the LORD  
    is the death of his faithful ones.  
<sup>16</sup> O LORD, I am your servant;  
    I am your servant, the child of your serving-maid.  
    You have loosed my bonds.

**<sup>17</sup> I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice  
and call on the name of the LORD.**

<sup>18</sup> I will pay my vows to the LORD  
    in the presence of all his people,  
<sup>19</sup> in the courts of the house of the LORD,  
    in your midst, O Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD!

**117** Praise the LORD, all you nations!  
    Extol him, all you peoples!

<sup>2</sup> For great is his steadfast love towards us,  
    and the faithfulness of the LORD endures for ever.

Praise the LORD!

**118** O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
    his steadfast love endures for ever!

<sup>2</sup> Let Israel say,  
    'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

<sup>3</sup> Let the house of Aaron say,  
    'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

<sup>4</sup> Let those who fear the LORD say,  
    'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

**<sup>5</sup> Out of my distress I called on the LORD;  
the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.**

**<sup>6</sup> With the LORD on my side I do not fear.  
What can mortals do to me?**

<sup>7</sup> The LORD is on my side to help me;  
    I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

<sup>8</sup> It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
    than to put confidence in mortals.

<sup>9</sup> It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
    than to put confidence in princes.

- 10 All nations surrounded me;  
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!**
- 11 They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;  
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!**
- 12 They surrounded me like bees;  
they blazed<sup>[a]</sup> like a fire of thorns;  
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!**
- 13 I was pushed hard,<sup>[b]</sup> so that I was falling,  
but the LORD helped me.**
- 14 The LORD is my strength and my might;  
he has become my salvation.
- 15 There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:  
'The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;  
16 the right hand of the LORD is exalted;  
the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.'
- 17 I shall not die, but I shall live,  
and recount the deeds of the LORD.
- 18 The LORD has punished me severely,  
but he did not give me over to death.**
- 19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the LORD.
- 20 This is the gate of the LORD;  
the righteous shall enter through it.
- 21 I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.
- 22 The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the chief cornerstone.
- 23 This is the LORD's doing;  
it is marvellous in our eyes.
- 24 This is the day that the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.<sup>[c]</sup>
- 25 Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!  
O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!
- 26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.<sup>[d]</sup>  
We bless you from the house of the LORD.
- 27 The LORD is God,  
and he has given us light.
- Bind the festal procession with branches,  
up to the horns of the altar.<sup>[e]</sup>
- 28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;  
you are my God, I will extol you.
- 29 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures for ever.

- What you might want to consider is how Jesus might have felt as he sang the words I highlighted in bold text?

In truth can you see how so much of these psalms fall into the actions of this final night on earth for Jesus.

- Very quickly what else do you notice?

How then do we know Jesus didn't drink or raise this final cup in the upper room, well as we have established so far the cup that Jesus describes as being his blood rather than the Passover Lamb's blood was the third cup of the Passover. The meal does continue in that upper room with singing as was expected at the Passover but look at what the gospels say next and think about what is missing.

Mark 14: 26 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Matthew 26: 30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

In Luke's account (chapter 22: 24-38) as soon as Jesus had given them the third cup the meal was brought to an abrupt end as a dispute broke out among the disciples as to who was the greatest, Mark and Matthew hint at this because they both have a dialogue between Jesus and Peter.

John's gospel is totally different as it does not really describe the order of the meal, but it does record Jesus dipping bread into a dish 13: 26-27 and giving the bread to Judas, after that we perhaps see a deeper account of the dispute and conversations that took place, John dedicates four chapters (14,15,16,17) to this before they leave the upper room and head out.

What is clear the Passover meal was not finished after they sang the psalms it all got very messy, Jesus kept referring to his own death and the disciples really didn't get it. Judas was pointed out as being a betrayer and other than Judas they didn't get that either. There is a dispute among them and comforting words and prayers given by Jesus. What had started out as a celebrational meal was now in tatters.

- We pause here for a moment and share maybe how we think the disciples might have been feeling at this point, what do you notice?

What all four gospels agree on next is that in cutting the meal short they all headed out to Gethsemane to an Olive grove in the Kidron valley, a place we are told by Luke Jesus often went to pray. It is the middle of the night, and it would have been very dark out there. Here Jesus prays, and we begin to find the evidence that Jesus had not drunk from the fourth cup and that at some point he still intended to but only when the moment was right.

Let's look at the four accounts again:

Mark 14: 35 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; **remove this cup from me;** yet, not what I want, but what you want.'

Matthew 26: 39 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, **let this cup pass from me;** yet not what I want but what you want.'

42 Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' NRSV in the NIV **if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it.**

Luke 22: 41 Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 42 'Father, if you are willing, **remove this cup from me**; yet, not my will but yours be done.' [[43 Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. 44 In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.]]

John 18: 11 Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. **Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?**'

- I have always been puzzled by this dialogue in the garden just before Jesus was arrested, was Jesus trying to avoid what would come next, was he asking God for a way out, what do you think?

The truth only becomes apparent when we understand the full Passover meal, Jesus wasn't avoiding anything, he hadn't finished the Passover meal in the upper room because that's not where the final cup of wine would be shared. If Jesus was avoiding the cross he would have finished the Passover meal properly, he knew exactly what he was doing. In that garden he was pointing this out, he was leading us to the fourth cup as we will see, and all four gospel writers know this because they understood the significance of the Passover and Jesus's place within it as the new Passover, the Messiah.

We all know what happens next, Jesus is arrested and sentenced to death, it all happens so quickly, mainly because it is the time of the Passover and the Sabbath is creeping up on them. I'm not for this course interested in those events but to look for the evidence of the moment when Jesus finishes the Passover meal with the fourth cup.

I guess before we move on once again I go back to my search for an answer:

- I want to ask if it is blood/wine that is the core of the Passover; why have we focussed on the actual cups that we present that symbol in as being central to our communion?

Let us now assume that the cup has no relevance other than being the vessel in which the blood of the lambs sacrifice was poured into, symbolised with wine because as we have already looked at the blood shed in the Temple couldn't be removed from the altar of sacrifice.

When Jesus is talking about the cup he is talking about the final consumption of wine that the fourth cup held, Jesus does in fact consume it so let's see where, it's in our gospel accounts it has always been there right before us.

Matthew 27: 33-34 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 **they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall**; but when he tasted it, **he would not drink it.**

Mark 15: 22-23 Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). 23 **And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh**; but **he did not take it.**

**Luke 23: 36** The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and **offering him sour wine,**

As ruthless as crucifixion was, those being crucified were offered a mixture of wine and myrrh to numb the pain they were about to endure, in fact it was argued that it kept them alive longer as a mild narcotic. It is referred to as gall which in Hebrew was derived from the bile of a gall bladder, it symbolized the bitterness of life, a life without God. The same term was used to describe poison. This first offering to Jesus which he refused to drink was a further insult, mocking him as a common criminal. Was it any wonder he said no thank you. It also meant he was willing to accept the full pain of the cross. So still at this point the fourth cup, the final wine has not been consumed.

With seconds left before Jesus died the fourth cup, the wine was accepted by Jesus.

Mark 15: 35-37 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for **Elijah.**' And someone ran, filled **a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink**, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' 37 Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

Matthew 27: 47-50 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for **Elijah.**' 48 At once one of them ran and **got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.** 49 But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' 50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

John 19: 28-30 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), '**I am thirsty.**' 29 A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on **a branch of hyssop** and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the wine, he said, '**It is finished.**' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

At the table after a dispute brought the Passover meal, Jesus's last supper to an end the final cup was not shared, if Jesus was to be the true fulfilment of the scriptures, the new covenant it had to be consumed. We can see clearly once we unpick it that Jesus did drink again, keeping his promise back at the table when he said in Mark 14: 25 'Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.' As Jesus drank that final sip on the cross he was then able to finish the new Passover meal as his very last words were 'it is Finished.' Have you ever wondered what those three words really meant, well the old Passover was finished the new had only just began.

John captures even more in his account, he gets it, he describes how just as the Passover hyssop is used to offer Jesus wine, the same Hyssop was dipped in the cup of the Lambs blood in the Temple and flung over the altar. As Jesus breathed his last the curtain behind which this was carried out split in two, Luke 23: 44. At this point of death it was Jesus who asked for the new wine, 'I am thirsty.' This had to be Jesus's action, his choice, after all they thought he would hang there before death finished him off a lot longer. In a final act he then becomes the new Passover Lamb, without blemish and having no bones broken.

John 19: 33-36 But when they came to Jesus and saw that **he was already dead**, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. 35 (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows[a] that he tells the truth.) 36 These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, '**None of his bones shall be broken.**'

**Luke 23: 47 47** When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, '**Certainly this man was innocent.**'

On the cross Jesus finishes what he had begun in the upper room the Passover meal of the new covenant.

This isn't a new theology it has been sitting there before us for centuries, its just that the church hasn't tended to look that deep or explain very well what our communion is all about. It has instead concentrated on its own traditions and policies around taking and receiving communion. We have created a system that is often more worried about the vessels and how we do communion than the why.

I might argue that it has purposely wanted to separate itself from the Jewish Passover to replace it with a unique Christian experience. Whilst we do indeed celebrate Christ's Passover it as we have seen is completely rooted in the first and subsequent Passovers that God's people enjoyed for so long, we I believe are stronger when we recognise this and accept that our communion is nothing completely new, it is a fulfilment of God's promises throughout the whole of human history.

We have one cup yes because we have one blood, that of Jesus Christ. As I have argued then throughout these weeks and sought the answer to my question 'that it was the wine that was shared and not the cup and that in this we have changed the central focus of communion by the element that delivers wine rather than the produce and symbol of suffering.' My conclusion is that Jesus did share four cups, it was what was in them that mattered, today we need simply to remember this, we can have a hundred cups on the table as long as what we remember is the wine in them is the symbol of Jesus's blood out poured for us, a the new Passover Lamb. That's what we share!

**I will bring you, free you, redeem you and take you as my own**, it took four cups to reveal this but one act of passion to bring them together.

- Any final points about this week?

Next time we look at a fifth cup to conclude our Lent course.

## Week Five

The fifth cup **Elijah's cup**: Our cup given to us by Christ, the thanksgiving cup which translates as eucharistia.

### Opening time of worship and prayer

Just when you thought it was all over we add another cup to the quandary.

If I'm being honest I would have liked to have stopped last week with the fourth cup of the Passover, but a fifth cup became very much part of the Jewish Passover by the 11<sup>th</sup> Century and when we celebrate the Seder Meal on Maundy Thursday you will see how it fits in with our own tradition of communion.

One of the big questions of the New Testament era was when would and who would be Elijah. Back in the time of Elijah nine hundred years before Jesus when he was delivering his prophecies to Israel, when his time came to depart this world he didn't die, instead he is recorded as going like this. 2 Kings 2: 11-12 *As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. 12 Elisha kept watching and crying out, 'Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.*

Jews believe that Elijah will return before the Messiah Malachi 4: 5-6 *Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.*

If Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah then somewhere or somehow Elijah needed to be seen. Jesus pointed out that he believed John the Baptist was Elijah or at least the essence/spirit of Elijah. Matthew 11: 11-14 *Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.*

Matthew 17 the transfiguration, here we can see that Jesus wasn't Elijah because he stands with him and Moses. The disciples questioned this, but Jesus tells them that Elijah has already been as they knew he meant John the Baptist.

- Why do you think this is all important?

Many around Jesus simply wouldn't accept he was the Messiah because they couldn't see where Elijah had come. It is the same today the chosen people of God are still waiting for the arrival of Elijah and only when here declares himself present will they accept the next person who claims to be the Messiah.

Now you may remember in previous weeks I said that there was a real belief that the Messiah would reveal himself at the Passover and thus setting God's people free becoming the new sacrificial lamb. As Christians our argument, that hopefully you can see clearly through this course is that Jesus claimed that position on the night of the last supper at the Passover.

If Jesus isn't the sacrificial lamb then as they are, the Jews are still waiting for the Messiah and Elijah.

At the time of Jesus, they still had the Temple and a hope that Israel would once again be God's mighty nation, the Messiah would take his place in the holy of holies as the great high priest as their earthly king.

By AD71 there was no longer a Temple or even much of Jerusalem left for any Messiah to claim, so the attention of the Passover once again came back to believers homes, especially as now the Jews had been scattered all around the world. This meant that the Passover meal that Jesus experienced had now changed again, a bit more like the first Egyptian Passover. Suddenly where lamb had been the central meal it was no longer used, for several reasons. One is that it was only the priests in the Temple who could slaughter the lambs, with no Temple and no High Priest this couldn't be carried out anymore. Those in their homes were not worthy enough to enact this out.

Another reason you will not find lamb at a Passover meal was more practical, as they moved to other countries lamb was not always available and where it was it wasn't Kosha so it was easier to abandon it and just have a symbol of lamb in a shank bone. Today Chicken is the most regularly served meet at a Passover meal, though vegetarian cuisine is becoming very popular as well.

What we will experience on Maundy Thursday is a modern Seder meal, it is still the Passover Meal the word Seder just translates as order, this meal is very ordered it must follow the strict pattern as various cups are shared, yes four cups are drunk throughout as the story of the exodus is told again.

What became traditional by the 11<sup>th</sup> century was the expectation that Eiljah might come to any seder at any time. Three things are observed in the meal:

1. an extra place is set at the table for Eiljah
  2. the door of the house is left open for him to enter
  3. a fifth cup is reserved for him called the cup of Eiljah
- Any thoughts at this stage, can you see any links to what Jesus did at the last supper?

Unlike the other four cups of the Passover Elijah's cup stands silently throughout the celebration, there are no blessings said for it, it simply represents future hope. The action that it symbolises has not taken place yet. The wine in the cup is not consumed even at the end of the meal simply poured back into the bottle it came from.

I guess the thing I like about the Elijah cup even if I believe Judaism has missed it, is that it allows the Passover meal to not just be a memory of the past, but it brings it into the present, the meal thus the story is not finished. Whilst as a Christian and as I have pointed out that Jesus declared that it the Passover is finished as he drank of the vine for the last time on the cross, we personally are still on a journey of discovery, there is still wine to be had. God's story is still alive in us, even in and at communion we eat and drink in remembrance of what Jesus did for us, past tense. It is only by the Holy Spirit and our own acceptance that what is simply bread and wine becomes part of who we are, one in Christ. I'll come back to that in a minute.

Some Jewish scholars believe that this fifth cup the only one to be given a true name came from an early tradition that wanted to keep celebrating after the official meal was ended. It was questionable should the cups used for the Passover then be used for as it were after party drinks. A fifth cup was then allowed for merriment, in time over the centuries the tradition changed, and Elijah's cup was born, today it is very much part of the Passover meal and not an add on.

Other rabbinic arguments began to appear, as we have learnt there are four I WILL sayings one for each cup from the book of Exodus, but actually there is a fifth, in verse 8 of Exodus 6, 'I WILL bring you into the land.' Why was this not included in the Passover, well some think it was originally used for the first 40 Years of the Passover as the Israelites wandered the desert, but after they entered the promise land God's promise was now a reality it didn't need remembering they were living it. When Isreal was

destroyed in 70AD there became a need for the fifth cup once again if you didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah, Israel needed that hope again, I WILL bring you [back] into the land.'

Just pause as we think about how this might or might not all make sense; discuss or ask questions about what you have just heard?

Finally, as we draw the course to and end, let's get back to Jesus and a modern seder take on that fifth cup, Elijah's cup and how we come to the church's communion cup.

If Jesus was the fourth cup then it was only he who could be the sacrificial lamb, yet Jesus asked his disciples before that to remember him every time they drank from any cup at any meal. The fifth cup is ours, it's not reserved for Elijah but for each of us, we are the ones invited to come in and share at Jesus's table, we are the ones who can sit in the chair. We are not going to pour the wine back into the bottle but accept the invitation to be part of the vine, we are the branches.<sup>7</sup> In the seder meal I describe how Jesus did something different he took his seat, Elijah's seat and he takes the cup, he breaks bread and shares wine and he asks us to join him. Now this is very symbolic, and it makes way for our communion even though this cup wasn't there at the last supper.

In truth the Jews have it right, it is the hope of the future, the cup was always there, because it is not cup one, two, three, four or five that matters, it is the wine and what it represents that matters. Let's go back to that reading from Kings, when Elisha couldn't see Elijah any more when he was taken into heaven. Elisha tears his clothes in two. Back at that moment the world could not see Jesus anymore for as he took his last breath the curtain in the Temple was ripped in two, revealing the altar on which millions of Passover lambs had been slaughtered, it was finished, it was over.

Just as Elijah was taken into heaven if we want to see Jesus face to face we need to follow him every step of the way, through life and yes through death then through resurrection and then ascension. When we eat bread and drink wine we are both remembering what Jesus did as well as taking the fifth cup of hope and looking to the future glory of God, 'I WILL bring you into the land', not this earthly kingdom but God's heavenly Kingdom. John in his revelational vision saw an invitation to a marriage, a supper of a lamb.<sup>8</sup> On the third day a wedding took place where Jesus turned water into wine.<sup>9</sup> Luke 24:46 and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day.'<sup>10</sup>

That's where I want to finish, any further thoughts or questions?

Conclusion, it's not the cup or the cups that matter, they are but vessels, it is the blood, the symbol of it, that is wine that is important, it is not the how we take it but the why we take it, traditions as we have heard and seen change but Jesus remains the same.<sup>11</sup>

John 1: 29 the voice of the new Elijah, John the Baptist to finish:

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<sup>7</sup> John 15: 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 19: 9 And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.'

<sup>9</sup> John 2

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 15: 1-4 Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. 3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

**The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'**

**Books used for reference and construction of this course:**

Bible quotes: New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Jesus and the Jewish roots of the Eucharist, unlocking the secrets of the last supper by Brant Pitre, Image New York Copyright © 2011, 2016 by Brant Pitre.

Josephus The Complete Works, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Copyright © 1998 by Thomas Nelson Publishers.

The Mishnah, A new translation by Jacob Neusner, Yale University Press New Haven and London, Copyright © 1988 by Yale University.

*Please note that there is plenty out there on the web especially from Jewish sources to help explain the meaning of the four cups and the Elijah cup. There are many links as well to how this applies to Jesus and the last supper, this is not a new theology it has been around for a very long time. If you wish to dig deeper have fun, I used many web-based resources to guide me through putting this course together. As I haven't directly quoted any of them in this course I have not referenced them.*

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