

There's something about "the last things", whatever those things end up being. The last day with a friend, last days at school, last day on vacation, last moment with a loved one, the last time I got to choose which direction I walked in the grocery store. Last things tend to have something "to them" you know? **Start Pictures Here.** Last meals are something that gets paid attention to. The pictures you're seeing are the last meals that have been requested by prisoner on death row in the USA. These meals are the last things that they ate before their sentence was carried out. You might recognize some of those names on that list, and some you won't. They are some pretty interesting choices and show us something about these men that committed horrible crimes. I'll never endorse what they did, but I have to admit that the last meal of these men is interesting in a few ways. There's one other picture I'd like to show you on this list...**picture of the last meal of Jesus**...what do you think of this one? A bit better than the single olive...but a far cry from the ice cream or the lobster tail right? And yet this last meal was the most significant last meal of them all, and it's one that we'll be celebrating together today in a few ways. Turn to the book of Mark 14:12 and we'll start reading together about the Last Supper of Jesus Christ. (read 12-16)

This first part is pretty preliminary, essentially about the preparation that the disciples need to make for Jesus, but even in the prep work for Jesus there's exciting things that can happen right? So, the disciples find this man carrying water (which is a standout type of sign, as that was woman's work for sure), and they book this upper room for the Passover meal. The fact that they got such a big room was kind of a miracle as well, because the Passover HAD to be celebrated in Jerusalem according to the Law and so there may well have been over two million people in the Jerusalem area at that time. So the man, and the room and the fact the the Holy Spirit revealed all of this to Jesus were all some small miracles in the preparation for that supper. That got me thinking about the small things that God can accomplish in your life, even in the small things that don't seem to be the big deal. **ONSCREEN: Do you have a story that you can share**

with your group about that? Has God shown himself to you in the little details of life?

Okay, thanks for doing that! I think it's amazing how God shows us in the small details of our lives and it's important that we remember that together - it's even a form of worship - to be thankful and testify to God's goodness and give Him the glory for that. Moving on in our passage, we go down to verse 17-21 (read). The meal that the disciples and Jesus are eating together is a devotional meal, one focused on remembering what God has done for the people of Israel, leading them out of Egypt hundreds of years ago, and this conversation happens in the "front half" of the meal at some point. Jesus, the host of meal is leading the meal and so when He speaks up, the people listen and He drops this bomb on them somehow....I wish I knew how it happened...I can see it happening in a lull of conversation...things get quiet and then into the silence those words - I tell you the truth - one of you is going to betray me. Imagine if you were the 12 disciples - this is directed at you - not the servants, this is someone who is eating from the bowl with Jesus. One of the key men, one of Jesus special 12. This betrayal is one of the most despicable and detestable acts in early Semitic culture - to betray someone who have eaten with is very very low - eating with someone is a deep thing, an act of trust and friendship....and then to betray your Lord and mentor, someone you've been with and learned from for 3 years? It's the worst. The disciples obviously want to know who that would be, and I can see them going around the room, asking themselves, others and obviously Jesus - surely not I? All of them asked and no one got pointed out. So, clearly Judas was a good actor and not under suspicion from any of the disciples that were there. But Jesus speaks to Judas in general and the rest of the disciples anyways when he says about how terrible it would be for that man who betrayed the Son of God - so bad that it would be better if he hadn't been born. This is a tough statement to understand right? This is where the fact that we worship the God who made us, the world and even created the concept time itself is difficult. As humans who live in the created timeframe, we have

trouble understanding a God who stands outside that timeframe and who seems to allow a lot of things to happen that are horrible things - like why not prevent Judas from betraying Jesus? Why not get a horrible person to do that? Someone who deserved it? And why stop there? Why not prevent Adam and Even from committing that first sin so that we could have avoided all this mess in the first place? At times it doesn't make a lot of sense when we run into the moments where the omnipotence and omniscience of God are revealed and yet bad things still happen. I can't claim to know all about this, not even close, but as I understand it - choice is near the center of this. We humans have been given choices to make, choices that dictate the path that we find ourselves on. Sometimes we make good choice, many times we don't, and one of the crucial things to remember here is that without choice, there really isn't any true love right? If we were made to love God and didn't have a choice in the matter, is it really love? No, not really. We all know that love with no choice isn't really love. Sadly though, evil can come then as well - where you can choose to love, you can also choose to hate or to go your own way. Choice is a double edged sword and it's very sharp. It's because of the fact that humans have been given free will and been allowed to choose that Jesus is here in the first place...and God could see what was coming hundreds of years ago when the betrayal of Jesus was foretold...and sadly, the choices Judas makes, known by God will place him in a world of hurt so bad that it would be better if he wouldn't have been born. Woe to him, indeed.

That brings us to the first part of what we know as the Last Supper, which is actually the third course of the Passover meal (read verse 22 If Jesus had been following the script of Passover, he would have taken the unleavened bread, broken it and said: "blessed art Thou O Lord, our God, King of the World, who brings forth bread from the earth" and then a blessing would be said over the matzah (the bread) and the bitter herbs they had there with them, but now Jesus goes "off-script" and starts saying something different than He normally would. He takes the bread, breaks it and blesses it like at a

normal Passover supper, but then He says - take this and eat it - for this is my body...and this isn't what happens at Passover, anywhere, ever. He's doing something new, something that hadn't been done before. The pain and the suffering that He was going to endure were pain and suffering that we caused. Our choices are almost always made out of self interest, to achieve what WE want, and many times, those choices are sinful, sometimes obviously and many times subtly....and as we were dead in those sins, not looking or caring about a saviour, not really even thinking we were wrong, Jesus came along, unasked for, and for many, unwanted, and did it anyways. His body was broken for your sins. He was broken to pay for your evil choices, and your uncaring choices and sometimes even what you think were good choices...good for you anyways. This bread, which he offers to the disciples was broken - for them, and for you. With that in your minds, take your pieces of bread, but before you eat, have a time of thankful prayer with your house church or family. Praise Jesus for His willingness to give up His glory and pay the price for your sin. This bread, which you hold in your hands is represented of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, which He willingly gave up to be broken...so that yours wouldn't have to be.

ONSCREEN: Pray together before eating the bread, thanking Jesus for His willingness to pay the penalty for your sin.

Now, we move to the second part of Jesus last supper, the wine (read 23-26). What Jesus refers to when He says "the new covenant" is likely a phrase found in Jeremiah 31:31-35, which says that the covenant that God makes through Christ is not a covenant like the old one, but something new, something different - something that is written on the hearts of the people, rather than through external rituals and sacrifices. I find that extremely significant, because Jesus literally uses food and drink to symbolize this new covenant, food and drink which we take INTO ourselves. This covenant that Jesus makes with us is one that isn't external, adhered to by rituals and sacrifices, it's INTERNAL, through faith and belief. The blood of the old covenant was sealed by the

blood of an animal, and in the Old Testament, the leader of the Israelites, Moses took that blood and literally flicked it and sprinkled it over the people of Israel - but this new covenant is sealed with JESUS - the true Lamb of God, not some animal, and it's not sprinkled on our heads - it's taken into our bodies symbolically by the eating of this bread and of this juice. They are symbols of the reality of the new covenant that Jesus sealed with His blood which was poured out when His body was broken open (remember the symbolism of Pastor Joes sermon last week!). Notice too, that Jesus says that this blood of the covenant was poured out for many, which is linked to Isaiah 53:12, which says that "he bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels". This is what makes the sacrifice of Jesus so so deep and scandalously unfair. Jesus was INNOCENT. He had done nothing deserving death, and yet was rejected, disrespected, counted amount rebels, stripped naked, spit on, mocked, beaten within an inch of his life, and killed by one of the most barbarous methods devised by human kind....there's a song that says "it was my sin that held him there". It was MY sin that held him there. It was yours as well. He who had no sin became utterly sinful - for you, and for me. Was that fair? No. Totally unjust, a mockery of justice. But He did it...why? Because He loves you. You didn't ask for it - he did it anyways. Can you see why we take communion seriously? It's the deepest remembrance we have of what the Lord Jesus did for us. Those who eat the broken bread indicate their desire to fellowship with Jesus and the rest of His disciples, and those that consume the cup indicate their commitment to the new covenant that Jesus died to seal for you. Before you take the cup and drink it, if the house church leader could take a Bible and read the whole chapter of Isaiah 53 to your church, and then partake together, that would be great.

ONSCREEN: Read Isaiah 53 together, and then drink the cup of communion together.

I'd like to say something else about communion...it's a multi-levelled experience. What we just did with the bread and the cup are the core of it, but I believe that communion ought to influence everything that we do...or at least it can. When I was doing youth here at PABC, we did communion once a year and we would do what we just did with the bread and juice, and it was great...but as we did that, I had my leaders in the basement setting up a huge long table full of two other elements - pizza and pop, and after we did the formal communion together, we would go downstairs and we would commune together with pizza and pop, enjoying a celebration together because of what God has done for us. It's not the formal communion we just celebrated, but it's a form of communion together - eating together, focused on what Jesus has done for us. It doesn't use the formal elements that Jesus used, but we already don't do it the same as Jesus did already right? He used wine and matzah bread...we use grape juice and leavened bread, rice cakes, pitas, homemade loaves, wonder bread...whatever! Communion does not hinge only on the precise elements...if it did we would still be using alcoholic wine and matza right? Communion is remembering Jesus death together, remembering that His body was broken for us, and His blood was shed for us. It's good for us to use those elements, because that's what Jesus used - but if you didn't have those two things - grab some water and carrots, or pizza and pop, or grilled cheese and orange juice! It may not "feel" right, but also remember that we have been doing church at home and IN homes for the last 3 months and even if it doesn't feel quite like it used to, I would challenge anyone to show me how meeting together in homes is LESS effective at accomplishing the goals of Christ when He formed the church. We're the people of God! Not meeting in a formal church building isn't going to stop us from communing with our God! We are people who have been bought and paid for by the body and blood of Jesus Christ - whenever we eat and drink ANYTHING we can remember the Body and the Blood of the Lord - and the fact that we are eating it with Him present with us (as He is present everywhere), and with the people of God surrounding us - we are COMMUNING with Him and with the people of

God! Communion is huge! It's eating and drinking and being with His people, it's celebrating that we are a people brought out of all kinds of terrible places by our faith in Jesus. We are all dependant on the forgiveness of Christ and THIS supper reminds us of that - why not let EVERY supper remind you of that? Why not every meal? This is a DEFINING thing for you. What Jesus did for you defined who you are now. If you believe, then communion is the celebration of that act of passion and self sacrifice that made you into a child of God - why WOULDN'T we celebrate that all the time? We **must** celebrate it all the time, we need to remind ourselves of it all the time, not just because it's so special, but because of what happens next in the passage.

(Read 27-31.) When I was studying, one of the commentators pointed something interesting out...he said that they all ate, they all drank, they all swore allegiance to Jesus here...and we'll see, and we know it happens - they all fall away as well. There's two things that stand out to me here. One of those is that we need to pray that we would be people that can stand on our convictions. Peter was the lead disciple, the spokesman, and he spoke out strongly that he would never leave Jesus or disown him...and I have to confess that I would likely have something just as strongly, and with just as much courage. But Peter was wrong, and not only did he deny Jesus (we'll see that next week), but he did it HARD. He didn't just lose control of himself, he denied Jesus three times - fully distancing himself from Christ. Not just distancing, but betraying in a sense right? Peter betrayed Jesus - not in the same way that Judas did, but put yourself in Jesus shoes. How would you feel in Jesus shoes as this all played out. Your lead man, the one you said you would use in the future, with all kind of leadership potential, the one who said that he would rather DIE than disown you...within hours denies that He even knows you. This is the man that you miraculously bailed out of temple tax money, who you helped walk on the water, who you've been with for three years and shared some of the deepest friendship and mentorship encounters with...he's Peter! He's the Rock that the new church will be built on...and you hear him deny that he knows you...not just once, but

three times. Some of you know that pain of betrayal and rejection, and it cuts really deep doesn't it. The other thing that stands out to me here is the way Peter talks about others, and stands apart from them. The tone of what he says...says to me that he has no problem believe that other people would betray and fall away from Jesus - but he NEVER will. He has no trouble looking at others and seeing weakness in them and even believes that they would do it - but he, Peter, the best and lead disciple would never do that, and Jesus says - not only will you do that, but you will do it three times....tonight. Ever done that? Ever looked and accused other people of a sin and then gone and committed that sin even worse than they have? I have. Ever looked at a brother or sister in Christ and thought "well if they would just be more like me, then everything would be fine" I've done that as well. Looking back, I'm ashamed of that. I had no right to think like that, and it makes me angry and embarrassed and all kinds of others things. Peter - the man he said he would never betray Jesus, betrayed him worse than everyone else that faded away. The only person Peter was better than at this point was Judas...not great. If there was a practical thing we can take away from this encounter, it would be to search your heart very very hard to see if you're being like Peter in any way. Peter was willing to believe the worst about others and the best about himself...is there a situation that you have in your life and heart that Jesus is trying to confront as he confronts Peter? We may not have the same issue as Peter, but we are far from perfect and we have all made choices that caused Jesus to go to the cross - we are all responsible for Jesus' death.

I think there's nothing more crushing to my spiritual life, health and well-being than a willful sin, where I do the wrong thing, fully knowing I'm wrong, and I don't care, because at this point, I am more important and my desires supersede God's will. My ability to choose allows me to do that, but the effects on my heart, my relationship with Jesus and my spiritual health are devastating. I can't imagine how Peter felt when this happened...but there's one last thing I want to say, because we skated right over what

might be the most encouraging verse for those of us who have sinned willingly as believers in Jesus, and that's verse 28 (read).

This verse is one of the most hopeful things for me as a Christian - because it means that Jesus is willing to forgive my horrible choices. All the disciples will fall away - Peter will deny Christ three times - but before all those brave promises and statements are made - Jesus has already said - I'll meet you on the other side. Did the disciples deserve that? Not a chance. They deserted their Lord in His hour of need. They denied that they knew Him. He was there for the all the time, taught them and helped them when they needed help, gave them an identity, gave them everything...and when He needed them, even the comfort of their presence...they all ran away. How would you feel at that moment? Abandoned, unwanted, bailed on, uncared for, alone. But before that even happened, Jesus forgave them. They treated him so poorly, and He forgave them before they even did it. Even though they fall away - Jesus will meet with them again. We'll see it later, when we study when Jesus is resurrected. But - you and I both know that this is unmerited, unasked for, undeserved favour. That's grace. It's not fair. Jesus deserved to have the disciples come crawling back, grovelling and pleading with apologies. They should have sought Him out - but they didn't. In fact it's like Jesus is "pre-forgiving" their failure and betrayal - because He loves them. That's how He feels about you as well - He loves you. He forgives you. He cares for you - and all before you asked and even when you didn't ask. The communion table that you just participated in is a table of grace, truly. Jesus wants you at that table so badly, he was willing to die for that. What an amazing God we have! The first line of that song we sang together says *"Hear the good news, you've been invited, No matter what others may say, Your darkest sins will be forgiven, You will always have a place."*

...so now what? What can we do because of what Jesus has done for us? That's the thing right? That's where this is going to hit us all in a different place, and I really hope the Spirit is speaking to your heart right now. You might not have a clue about all

this Jesus stuff, but hearing this has made you really think about how much He loves you, and that you want to know more. I want to help you with that - please call me, my number is on the church website. Maybe your hearing this and are just so amazed and thankful that Jesus has done this for you and you just want to worship Him - do that! Go for a walk, sing a song and celebrate the communion you have have with Jesus everyday, and maybe this hits you in a “Peter” place, where you realize that you’ve got things that Jesus is confronting in you, you must begin to weed that sin out of your life. Difficult, but because it’s God’s will, it can happen. No matter where you’re at this morning, we have much to be thankful for and to praise God for. His Son has begun something new in you, and we can celebrate that. We’ll close our service now, but there’s one last thing for you folks in house churches, and that is that I’d like you to share one change that God has made in your life as you’ve grown in him. Philippians 1 talks about how God began a good work in you and is carrying it on to completion - what’s something God has worked on in your life? How have you changed since meeting Jesus? God bless you folks, have an excellent week, please be praying for your elders this week especially Saturday as we meet to pray and discuss the future of PABC!

ONSCREEN: Share with your group one way that you have changed since meeting Jesus.