

(mis)Understanding Jesus Part 8

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[0 : 00] Well, in the morning at the moment we are doing a study, as I'm sure you know, that's got two titles. The first title is Understanding Jesus and that's what we're trying to do.

We're looking at some key moments in Jesus's ministry to better understand who he is. But our other title, as we say each week, is Misunderstanding Jesus because we are hoping that we will also identify some of the ways in which Jesus has been misunderstood by people in his own time and by people today. We're drawing towards a conclusion to this series and so today we're going to come to the passage that we read which records what happens the night before Jesus died. We can read again Luke 22 verse 19 to 20 and he took bread and when he'd given thanks he broke it and gave it to them saying, this is my body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of me. And likewise the cup after they had eaten saying, this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. This chapter is taking place in the upper room. It's the night before Jesus dies on the cross. By this stage the disciples had been with Jesus for three years. Over that period they had come to understand more and more about who Jesus is. So they'd witnessed the fact that he was a miracle worker.

They'd saw that he could cast out demons. They'd recognized that he spoke with astounding authority, different to any of the other religious leaders around him. They'd come to understand that he was a prophet. They'd even come to realize that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. But in the midst of all that they discovered there was one thing that they still hadn't fully understood. They hadn't fully understood that in order for him to accomplish everything that he was going to do, Jesus had to die. So here in the upper room Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure. As part of that he institutes the Lord's Supper, which was what we read. And in doing so he says something absolutely massive. He says, this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. That's a huge statement.

And if we are going to understand Jesus, then we need to understand what this means. But what on earth does it mean? Why did Jesus say this cup that's poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood? Well that's what I want us to think about today and in order to explore this we're going to ask three questions. What is a covenant? What is the covenant? And what does it mean for you and for me? So first question, what is a covenant?

When you see the word covenant in connection with the Bible there's five things that should come to your mind. Well actually there's six but I'm only going to tell you five just now. The first thing is that covenant is referring to a relationship between people.

[3 : 56] That's really what a covenant is. It is establishing a special relationship between people. A bond is formed between the parties involved. That's the first thing to come to mind, relationship.

The second thing is clear, firm, articulated truth. So the relationship isn't vague, it doesn't kind of fluctuate, it's not kind of free for all, there's no spin or deception.

It's a relationship that's grounded on very clearly set out terms. These are set out and they describe the expectations and the boundaries of the relationship. So there's truth involved.

Third thing that's involved is that a covenant is a life and death commitment. So the concept of covenant is not used for something minor, it's not just a casual thing. Covenant is to do with stuff of life and death importance. The commitment involved is to the highest level. Fourth, it involves real life action. So covenant's not just a theoretical concept that's just sort of written on a piece of paper that then has no kind of impact on real life. Covenant has a direct effect on how the people involved live. It shapes the actions and behavior of the people involved. It means that there's certain things you do and there's certain things you don't do. Now that's not in the sense of slavery, like you must do this, you mustn't do that. But in the sense of a willing commitment to obey the obligations that this covenant brings towards one another. So there's relationship, there's truth, there's commitment,

there's action. Fifth thing is lasting security. The result of the covenant relationship should be that there is lasting security for those who are part of it. The firm truth of the agreement, the seriousness of the commitment, the reality of real life obedience, it all comes together to establish a safe, secure, consistent relationship that you can rely on. So these five elements are what lies at the heart of a covenant. And

I put these headings up here just to summarize them. Covenant relationship, covenant truth, covenant commitment, covenant obedience, covenant security. Now all of that might seem a little bit obscure. And so you might think yourself, well, okay, that all sounds, that's great, interesting theology. But it seems a million miles from tomorrow morning, it seems a million miles from last week, it can just seem all a bit strange. But if we think that this has got nothing of relevance for the way in which we live our lives and the way in which everybody around us lives their lives, then if we think like that, we are misunderstanding what Jesus is teaching us. Because what I hope you can see is that all these things that I've just summarized there, really, these are just summarizing what all good, healthy relationships look like. So a great example of a covenant is marriage. It brings two people together in a relationship. It's grounded on clear, firm truth. It's established by vows and by a legal status that's granted. It's a commitment for the whole of life. It involves real life, action and obedience for both husband and wife. There's certain things you do and that you don't do when you come into that relationship. And it brings lasting security. But even for stuff that's not as formal as marriage, the same emphasis applied because what we've just described is really just what any good friendship looks like. So you think of your best friends, you relate to them, you have a relationship with them as friends. That relationship is grounded on truth as you get to know each other and learn more about one another. If somebody is kind of living a lie and pretending to you that there's something else, that's not a strong healthy friendship at all. It's grounded on truth. All the best friendships are for life and the greatest friendships of all are the ones that will go to the point of life and death. Greater love has no one than this than the one who lays down their life for their friends. If you're someone's friend, there's definitely things you do.

[8 : 50] You talk to them, you spend time together, you help each other and there's things you definitely don't do. You don't gossip about them, you don't pick them up or put them down. You don't take advantage of them. And a good friendship brings lasting security. It's a beautiful thing. And even to go to another example, even a good employee-employee relationship looks like this. There's clear terms and expectations, there's commitment, there's real life obligations for the boss and for the staff. And if things are the way that they should be, then everyone benefits from lasting security. And equally, problems arise in marriage or in friendship or in the workplace when individuals fail in these five areas that we're identifying.

All of this means that when you see the word covenant, it's not talking about some weird archaic theological concept from way back in the Bible's times. It's actually talking about everything that we crave in our relationships with others. And we can prove that simply by looking at the opposite of these five things. So covenant relationship is the opposite of selfish individualism. Covenant truth is the opposite of deception and manipulation. Covenant commitment is the opposite of being superficial or changeable. Covenant obedience in real life is the opposite of kind of airy-fairy, half-hearted, hypocritical waffle. Covenant security is the opposite of being casual in our relationships. And in today's world, in the society, the culture that we are living in today, whether it's with friends, with colleagues, with who we go out with, so many relationships today are marred by behavior that is selfish, manipulative, shallow, half-hearted and insecure. And if you've been on the receiving end of that, you will know how horrible that can be. And this explains to us why the very things in life that should give us the most joy are all too often the things that cause us the most pain. You ever notice that? That you think of the stuff that really should just make life amazing, you know, friendships, our jobs, our relationships, these are the things that should bring just the best things in life. These are the things that we dream of, and yet all too often these are the socials of the greatest pain that we experience. Broken friendships, nightmare colleagues, failed relationships, these are all incredibly hard. In that kind of world, the word covenant is thrilling. It is everything that we long for. And the amazing thing about Christianity is that covenant is what lies at the heart of the whole thing.

That brings us to question two, what is the covenant? When Jesus establishes the Lord supper after taking the bread and giving it to the disciples, he takes a cup of wine and he says, this cup that's poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. That means that at the heart of Jesus'

mission and at the heart of his death is this thing called the new covenant. It's central to what he's doing. But what is it? What is the covenant?

What is he talking about? Well put very simply, the covenant is the big thread that runs right through the whole Bible. So if you imagine, you've got Genesis over here, all the way to Revelation with everything in between, there's a thread running right from the beginning, right through to the end that holds it all together. That thread is the covenant. It's the framework that runs through and undergirds the whole of Scripture. And that's reflected in the titles that are given to the two big sections of the Bible. We've got the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word Testament simply means covenant. So we could just as easily say, and probably it would actually be a wee bit better if we said Old Covenant and New Covenant in terms of the two sections that the Bible is divided into. The whole Bible is framed around this concept of covenant. So if we go back to our five areas, Christianity is all about the relationship between God and humanity. And that relationship is a covenant relationship. Christianity is grounded on solid, clear, stated truth. That's what the Bible is. That's why we have a Bible. That's why Christianity is based on a book on words, on the truth. It's setting out the terms, expectations and implications of our relationship with God. Christianity is a matter of life and death. The whole thing is about living and dying. It's about heaven or hell. It's about being saved or being lost. Christianity is all about real life action, real life obedience. The Bible is constantly presenting us with a record of real life stuff that's happened. And it's all building up to the cross. The whole Bible is centered on the real life action that Jesus actually does.

[15:06] And for us as Christians, the reality of what he's done transforms the way in which we live our lives in response. And the goal of it all is lasting security. In fact, the goal is eternal security for all who trust in Jesus. Covenant is at the heart of what Christianity is all about. So when we talk about the covenant, we are talking about God's great plan to bring us back into a relationship with him. But as we said, the Bible divides that into two sections, old and new. And it's very important that we understand how these fit together.

This as we've said several times in this series is something that's so easy to misunderstand how the old covenant and new covenant fit together. When we say old and new covenant, we mustn't think of old and new in the sense of chucking out the old and bringing in a replacement. So we often very often will think like that. So I don't know if anybody bought anything new in the past week, you might have bought something new. I actually bought a new guitar last week, which was very exciting. Because my old one was broken. It got damaged unintentionally by a toddler who ran into it. But it was old and rubbish anyway. So I bought a new guitar last week. So my old guitar is getting chucked out, replaced with the new one. Maybe if you've got new shoes, new jacket, new car, I don't know, whatever it is. When we think old new, we think chuck out the old, bring in the new. That's not how we should understand the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's not that the first half of the Bible gets chucked away and it's like, oh, don't bother reading

Genesis to Malachi anymore, because now we've got the New Testament. It's not like that. Instead, we need to think in terms of the old being a shadow and a new being the fulfillment.

So instead of thinking of terms in terms of old and new stuff, it's better to think in terms of an old way and a new way of doing things. So let me give you an example. When I was a young child and when I was just very small, maybe two years old or three years old, I wobbled when I walked just like any other toddler that you've all seen. And I would get my words muddled up when I spoke. So my older brother's name was Jonathan, is Jonathan, but I used to call him John in because I couldn't say Jonathan. And you've seen all of that amongst little ones in your own families. As an adult, I don't do that anymore. The old has passed because the fullness of adulthood has come. Now I can walk fully and I can talk coherently. It's not that the old me has been thrown away and abandoned and replaced. I'm still the same person, but the old way of walking, the old way of talking has been fulfilled and completed in the new. That's how the Bible works. That's how it's to be understood. Covenant runs right through the whole thing. But in the Old Testament, there are shadows which point towards the full reality in the new, in Jesus. And so that relationship of shadow reality is how we need to understand it. In terms of covenant, there's four big covenant shadows in the Old Testament, and they're all connected with key individuals. The first is Noah. And with Noah, the focus is on creation. So you'll remember with the story of Noah, the world is judged because it's so simple, but there's also a sense of renewal. The focus in many ways is on the earth, the animals,

the creation, and there's a great fresh start under Noah. And the sign of that covenant is the rainbow. And so that makes sense. You think the focus is on the world, the sign appears in the world, in the sky when it rains.

Next big covenant moment is with Abraham. Here the focus is on family. It's a shadow of God restoring a divided and hostile humanity. God comes to Abraham and he says, out of your family, all the families in the world are going to be blessed. The sign of that covenant is circumcision. And again, that makes perfect sense because the whole covenant is focused on family. The sign is placed on the male reproductive organ. Third one is Moses. Central to that covenant is the law and the temple. Moses takes the people out of Egypt. He's given the 10 commandments. He's instructed to build the tabernacle, which then becomes the temple.

[20 : 32] It's a shadow of God restoring humanity to bear the image of God so that we can be like him and be with him. Obeying God's law makes us like God. The tabernacle is where God comes and dwells with us. It's pointing to the fact that we can be like him and be with him. The sign of that covenant is the observation of the Sabbath, which points us back to Eden where humanity was created, bearing the image of God and where God dwelt with us. And the fourth big covenant moment is with David. Central to that is the kingdom. It's a shadow of God's kingdom being established. All the damage of sin being put right, everything being restored to what God intended to be. The sign of that covenant is that David's descendants are going to be upon the throne. Now, all of these are really important, but all of these are shadows. In and of themselves, they were a combination of success and failure.

So after Noah, there was the promise that the world would never again be destroyed by a flood, which is great, but it's still cursed, it's still broken, and all sorts of terrible things are still happening. After Abraham, a great family nation was established, the nation of Israel, but it was pretty tiny compared with the rest of humanity, and it kept on dividing. After Moses, there was clear instruction in the Ten Commandments, and there was the amazing privilege of God being present among the people in the Tabernacle and ultimately in the temple, but they kept on disobeying. They kept on ignoring God's law and eventually God's glory departed from the temple. And after David, there was a long line of kings, but half of them were terrible, and eventually the kingdom was conquered by foreigners. None of these shadows restored things properly, and they were never intended to, because they were only ever meant to be shadows. And that's why I've drawn them as arrows, because they're all pointing towards something else. And what they're pointing to is the new covenant. This is what Jesus is talking about. The whole reason he has come is to fully achieve everything that these shadows pointed towards. So for the creation, Jesus has come to defeat Satan, to destroy the kingdom of evil, to break sin's curse, and to restore the whole universe into a new creation, a new heavens and a new earth. That's why he did miracles, to give a glimpse of the healing and restoration that's going to come through his mission in the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth. For the family, Jesus has come not just to unite Abraham's biological descendants, but he's come to unite the whole of humanity. He in fact, he's come to make a new humanity of Jews, Gentiles, every family, every nation, every race, every class, all united as brothers and sisters in one great family. For the law, he's come to fulfill all that God's law required. And he's come to teach us all that God's law instructs. And in doing so, we can learn and understand and grow and fulfill our potential to be what God has created us to be. For the temple, he's not just come to give us a temple, he's come to make us the temple. So instead of God dwelling in a tent or a building in

Jerusalem, he's come to dwell in your heart and mine by his spirit. And for the kingdom, Jesus has come as king. As the gospels tell us, the kingdom of God has come right now and forevermore, Jesus reigns as king over all the universe. And he's calling us all to follow him, to live out our lives as citizens of his kingdom. Everything in the Bible is pointing towards this moment when the shadows of the old covenant become a reality in the new. It all centers on this great plan of God to establish a new covenant. But in order for it all to happen, Jesus has to die. He has to die because his death is needed to make atonement for all of our covenant failures. He's come to fulfill the covenant, to complete

God's plan of salvation. He's come to bring you back into a relationship with God. And he did it all by pouring out his blood on the cross. That's why he can take a bottle of wine, a cup of wine, and say this cup is the new covenant in my blood. But what does all this mean for you? Well, I hope that it helps you to see how the whole Bible fits together. I hope it helps you to see just how big and

brilliant God's covenant plan of salvation is. And I hope it makes you love that word covenant because it's such a brilliant word. But you might find yourself looking at it all thinking, well, yes, all that sounds great. All that sounds great. But how can I live up to it? It's so easy to think, you know, covenant relationship, that sounds great. But my relationship with God is nowhere near where it's meant to be. It's so easy to think, well, I'm a failure. I've mucked up either as a Christian or I've mucked up before I even ever had the chance to become a Christian.

I don't match up. It's easy to think, well, covenant truth, that sounds great. But I struggle to understand it all. There's so much I don't know, so much I need to learn. And the truth about my life is that I've made a ton of mistakes and I keep on making mistakes. Covenant commitment sounds great, but sometimes I just feel like giving up. Sometimes I feel tired, discouraged, disillusioned. Maybe you think people have hurt me. And I've let other people down myself.

[27 : 24] Most of the time I don't feel very strong or healthy in my faith. Covenant obedience sounds great, but I'm constantly attracted to sin. I can't say to God, I've always done what you want me to do. And covenant security sounds ideal for those who are doing really well as Christians. I just feel like a disappointment to God most of the time. Maybe you feel like that. Maybe you feel like that as a Christian. Maybe you feel like that as somebody who wants to be a Christian. And so you might say to yourself, well, yeah, all this sounds great.

Covenant theology is brilliant for the proper Christians. Doesn't really apply to me. Well, if you feel like that, I can understand why you do. But I'm also so happy to tell you that you're completely wrong. You're completely misunderstanding Jesus. Because who is all of that for? Who is the blood of the covenant poured out for? Who are the kind of people that get to share in this? Is it for the elite, the strong, the wise, the successful? Is it for those who are spiritually on fire? No. It's for you. Jesus's goal is to bring you into that covenant relationship with God. Jesus has come to reveal his truth to you.

Jesus has come to make a life and death commitment to save you. Jesus has come to take action and to obey everything required of him so that you might be restored. Jesus has come to give you eternal security. And it does not matter how weak you are or how many times you've stuffed up in your life or how many times you failed because the promises and the blessings of the covenant are never, ever dependent on us. It is not about what we do. It's not about us matching up. It's not about us doing anything because Jesus does it all. The covenant is not about our truth, our commitment, our obedience, our efforts. It is all about him, his truth, his commitment, his obedience. He is the one who makes us secure and far more than you will perhaps ever realize is that he is the one who wants to be in a relationship with you forever. And it doesn't matter how useless or broken you are because all of the incredible theology of the covenant is for weak, broken people like the disciples in this upper room, like you and like me. And this is where we come to the sixth thing that we need to know about the covenant. Remember I told you at the start that there's these five things that we're going to have to remember but actually there's six. Well, here we are at six. We've been saying that the covenant is represented by these arrows. You can see that on the screen there. And that's partly because they keep pointing forward. So the arrows are pointing forward. The Old Testament arrows, Old Covenant arrows are pointing forward to the coming of Jesus. The New Covenant is pointing forward to the return of Jesus and the full consummation of the kingdom of God on the last day. So they're arrows because they're pointing forward, but they are also drawn as arrows because the covenant is driven along by something. There's a tidal wave of strength pushing, pushing, pushing these arrows forward. There's a relentless momentum that drives Jesus through his ministry all the way to the cross. These arrows are being driven along. But what's driving them? What drives them forward? Well, the force driving them all along is covenant love. Unstoppable, unrelenting, unending, unbreakable covenant love. And we can prove that because if you look at every single one of these people identified in the arrows under the Old Covenant era, they've all got one thing in common. They all messed up. Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, come into the disciples. It's the same Peter, James, John, all the other disciples, you, me, they all failed again and again. The arrows never stop. And that's because God's covenant love never fails. When Jesus holds up this cup, he is saying, I will never, ever give up on you. And that's why covenant theology is the coolest thing ever because it's telling you that threaded through the whole of the Bible from Genesis, right through to Revelation and spanning across the whole of history is the covenant plan of God, which is driven forward by the fact that he loves you and he will never, ever give up on you. And all you have to do is trust him because that's

the terms of his covenant.

All he asks is that we trust him and follow him. Just go for it. I mean, let's pray.

[33 : 49] Father, we stand in awe at your covenant love and we thank you so much that through Jesus and his shed blood, we can come into that covenant relationship with you. Help us all to understand these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our closing Sam is from Psalm 103. The sing Sam's version, verses one to 11. These words we played and will stand to sing Sam 103 to God's praise.

The Lord forgives you all your sins and gives you sickness and distress. Your life be saved from the grave and comes here in his tenderness. It satisfies you, he decides.

The Lord is known for righteousness and justice to death.

The Lord is known for righteousness and justice to death.

[36 : 13] Say, Lord, to sin in no ways, His mighty deeds to His well-sons.

The Lord is merciful and kind, To anger, so unful of grace, He will not constantly be proved, Or in his anger, hide his face. He does not punish, turn his keys, Or give her sins, they're just reward, And greatest love as I have sent.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Be with you all. Amen.