

A Place at the Table: Rediscovering the Wonder of the Lord's Supper (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly 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 And he took a cup, and when he had given 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." ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had 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." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ²¹ But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. ²² For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" ²³ And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵ And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. ²⁷ For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

²⁸ "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, ²⁹ and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, ³⁰ that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:14–30)

An Empty Tradition?

- A. I was reading a New York Times article the other day and one of the authors referenced in it was talking about how sometimes we can participate in these religious traditions—especially around holidays and things—not because they mean anything to us anymore, but because it's what we've always done, it's a part of our family's heritage, or something like this.
1. In this lady's case she was Jewish ethnically but never had been in a religious sense and yet, growing up, as a kid, her parents would have everyone in the family recite these prayers and things at Hanukkah time anyways. And it just seemed off to her. It just seemed empty. And so now she's not going to do that with her kids.
- B. Now, I begin this way because I do think sometimes what we call the Lord's Supper—when we take the bread and the wine/juice on a Sunday—it can be like this for us, where we just do it maybe because we've always done it, but it doesn't seem all that meaningful to us. If we're honest, it feels a little empty.
1. And, if that's you, I want to try to help . . .

- C. This is our second week actually looking at this text (though, if you noticed, I've now brought in a little more for our consideration there with [vv. 24-30](#)). And I said this was going to be Part 2 of 2 on this matter of the Lord's Supper . . . but I'm going to need a Part 3. This morning I'm really only going to get through the first half of what I really want to say.
1. But in the first sermon, you recall, I was trying to consider in particular what this meal means and is for Jesus, from His perspective. I gave us three things: It's (1) Picture; (2) Promise; and (3) Plea.
 2. This week I said we'd come back and look at the meal now from a slightly different perspective asking: "Okay, so that's what this meal is for Jesus, what about for me?" And so I've got three more things for us to consider here: It's (1) Fellowship; (2) Food; and (3) Fuel.
 - a. We'll only get through that first one this morning. But I hope, by the time that we're done with all this, that the Lord's Supper—partaking of it together as a church—seems anything but empty to you. I hope we all through the course of these sermons rediscover something of the wonder of it all!

(1) Fellowship

Our Relationship with Food

- A. As Americans, in particular I think, our relationship with food is a bit of a tangled mess, right?
1. Some of us see food, perhaps, from a mere utilitarian perspective—we just eat to get energy to do our work and things. We eat on the go, while on the way to stuff that really matters.
 - a. I had a friend in college, who would just eat a sack of potatoes, he just needed substance, energy, it didn't matter how it tasted and things. It's just calories, and he needed them, as cheaply and efficiently as possible. I can be prone to this sort of thing, especially back when I was single in college.
 2. For others of us food, with all its calories, represents a formidable threat, and we feel the need to count every one. Food, while enjoyable, is dangerous. We want to eat but we shouldn't and when we do we feel guilty and ashamed and things. There's this sort of battle we have with it. We want a certain body type or whatever and food threatens to rob us of that.
 3. For still others of us, we've made food into our escape. This has been especially tempting during COVID times, right? What else am I going to do while I'm home all day? I'm going to eat . . . and eat . . . and eat. My life doesn't feel so bad in those moments while I'm mowing on that chocolate cake or sipping on that merlot or whatever. It's an escape.
 - a. It's a way of barraging my physical senses with pleasure in an effort to distract myself momentarily at least from the fact that my emotional and spiritual state are all out of whack—that things are not going so well on the inside. I put stuff in my mouth as a way of running from the stuff going on in my heart.

- B. So we all have different experiences with and approaches to food and meals and things, but one aspect we have to catch is the importance of the table as a place of fellowship.
1. This is certainly still true today I think. We understand meals as a place of shared experience and communion with others.
 - a. I remember in the Christmas movie *Elf*, when, if you've seen it, you remember the son is trying to tell Buddy how to ask Zoey Deschanel out on a date. And he says: "Listen, if you like that girl, here's what you have to do: you've got to ask her to 'go eat food.' That's what adults do. They eat together." And so Buddy takes his advice and it's wonderfully awkward and things.
 - i. But this kid's right. We still do approach food in this way as well. It's a way of moving towards another person.
 2. And, if this is true even in our day, it was especially true in the days of Jesus—in ancient near eastern cultures like that of Israel. The table wasn't merely a place where you get your calories, or count your calories, or indulge your appetites or whatever. It was preeminently a place for family and friends to gather and grow together.
 - a. This is why the religious leaders are so thrown off by the sorts of people Jesus eats with—sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors. This wasn't just eating food on His way to something more important . . . this was fellowship, this was moving towards these people with affection and a desire to know them more deeply and intimately. And that's why it was so scandalous!
- C. And this is what I wanted to bring out first here with regard to this meal Jesus is sharing with His disciples and the meal He continually calls us to share with Him as well now as His church. It's a place of fellowship with our Savior.
1. When He says "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you . . ." (v. 15) that's at least part of what He's getting at: "I want to be with you. I want to eat food together."
 - a. The bread and the wine and the meal here then are tokens of welcome and acceptance, of intimacy and affection . . . tokens of fellowship.

Concerning This Fellowship

- A. Now, there are a few things we could say about this fellowship that we have with Jesus around in and around this meal: It's (1) Established by His Sacrifice; (2) Carried On in the Spirit; (3) Enjoyed with Others; and (4) A Foretaste of the End.

(1) Established by His Sacrifice

- A. Here's the bottom line on this: you and I don't belong at this table . . . and yet, as we see here, we do belong at this table. How is that?! Well, in short, it's because of His sacrifice—what He's about to endure on our behalf at Calvary.

1. We see this a few different ways in the text here . . .
- B. First, you see the answer is there even in the verse I just quoted. Let me finish the sentence: “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (v. 15).
1. You see, even there, the cross is breaking in, casting it’s shadow over the whole meal, as it were. The only way we can have this sort of fellowship with Jesus around the table now and in the coming kingdom is because He would suffer in our place on that cross for our sin. If He doesn’t suffer, we don’t get in, the bouncer stops us at the door.
 - a. The nametags with yours and my name on it placed around the table of that heavenly banquet, they’re written in blood, engraved with nail and thorn, right? That’s how you get a seat. This fellowship is established by His sacrifice.
- C. And, of course, we see this idea also pictured in the very meal itself, don’t we? We spent a lot of time on this last week, so I’ll just mention it in passing. But, remember, the Lord’s Supper as Jesus is instituting it here, it’s built out from the Passover meal whereby the people of Israel would celebrate how God brought them out from Egypt to freedom ultimately through the shed blood of an innocent lamb sacrificed in their place.
1. The whole meal here then is picturing this sacrifice by which our fellowship with God is established. That’s how we get in. His body broken for us. His blood poured out for us. His life laid down on that altar for our sin just like the Passover lambs of old.
- D. But, you know, there’s something else I wanted to consider with you on this as well. You see, yes, Jesus’ death on the cross is the fulfillment of the Passover lambs and things, but we also know it’s really the fulfillment of the entirety of the various sacrifices and offerings outlined and required in the OT system. Stick with me here for a moment.
1. The book of Leviticus (which I’m sure is one your favorite books in all the Bible) as you may know describes various sacrifices and things that a Jewish worshiper would need to offer up to God at one time or another. And, again, what we come to see is that Jesus is the end goal of all of them. You can take all that you read there, wrap it up, put a nice big bow on it and lay it down at the foot of Christ, because He’s the point, He’s the fulfillment of it.
 - a. He’s the burnt offering in that He offers His whole self up to God and is consumed by the fire of His holy wrath.
 - b. He’s the guilt and sin offerings in that His death makes atonement for our sin and washes us clean.
- E. But the one I wanted to bring your attention to in particular is what they called the peace offering. The peace offering was made in connection with a vow to God or in thanksgiving for what God had done in the person’s life.
1. But here’s what we must understand: the peace offering was the one offering in which the worshiper was permitted to partake—he or she would actually share in the sacrificial meal as it were, they’d eat and drink of part of what was offered.

- a. You see, in the other offerings, the imagery is really that of a person is preparing a meal for God. The altar is understood as a table in many ways.
 - i. The burnt offerings in particular were accompanied by grain offerings, cakes, oil, wine and things. But it was all handed over—it was all for God, and the worshiper is pictured as a host, honoring the Lord as his venerable guest.
 - b. Now, these peace offerings also had the same sorts of accompaniments, but this time it's as if God turns the table on things and He becomes the host and you and even your family partake of the feast. You come in maybe thinking you're serving Him, but, surprisingly, He turns and serves you. You share in the meal together. You fellowship with God in and around and because of that sacrifice. That's the idea.
- F. Last week we read in [Exo 24](#) how the first and old covenant was ratified by the blood of various sacrifices—where it was sprinkled on the altar and then sprinkled on the people.
- 1. But I didn't mention that these offerings were identified in particular in [v. 5](#) as “burnt offerings” and “peace offerings.”
 - 2. Nor did I tell you what happened immediately after the covenant was confirmed. You see, the Law was read, the people said, “We will do it!”, the sacrifices were made, the blood of the covenant was sprinkled as a sign and seal of it all, and then . . . [vv. 9-11](#): “⁹Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, ¹⁰and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. ¹¹And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.”
 - a. God Himself says: “[M]an shall not see me and live” ([Exo 33:20](#)), and yet here, God lays not a hand on these men and, instead, they eat and drink in His presence. How? On what basis? Because of the sacrifice. This is what the peace offering stood for.
 - i. One commentator notes that these men here are simply “[partaking] in what the peace offering signifies: fellowship and communion in the presence of God” (ESVSB).
 - (1) This is where all the various offerings are headed—the burnt offerings and sin offerings and all of this . . . it's to get to the place of peace with God, the place of fellowship with Him . . . it's to get a place at the table!
- G. And, of course, all of that sits in the background of our text here in [Luke 22](#) as Jesus establishes what we now call the Lord's Supper. Don't you see it? He flips the script. He's God, but He's also the Host, and even more than that He's also the sacrificial offering and meal.

1. And the point is: this is how you get fellowship with Him. By way of His sacrifice. He is fulfilling what all the OT stuff was about. And we get to behold the face of God and eat and drink in His presence without fear of His wrath.
- H. And what this means for us is we don't come in clean. And you have to hear that!
1. You know, if you're going out to dinner, you try to wash yourself up first right. Especially for something like a wedding reception or things like that. We spend forever getting the right clothes and the right hair and all that. You're getting all these measurements taken. You're trying to lose weight like weeks before so you can fit in that dress. That sort of thing.
 2. But listen to me, that's not how this table works. We come in dirty. That's what the sacrifice at the center of the table means. You don't come pull up a chair once you get clean, you pull up a chair to get clean!
- I. I thought of the Prodigal Son at this point. You remember how he comes home—head low, smelling like the muck of pigs, thinking there's no way I can sit down at my dad's table, hoping maybe he can at least hang with the servants. He surely can't be a son anymore. He's blown it. He's too filthy. Right?
1. But what happens? The father sees his boy coming from afar, and he sets off running, and what does he do? Shame him? Slap him? No. He kills the fattened calf and throws a feast. "Come, son, come sit at the table, the place of honor, and eat!" "But dad I smell like pigs." "Son, you don't clean yourself up before you come. You come and I clean you up. That's how this works."
- J. You know, just to make this crystal clear for us, this is why Jesus, in John's account of the Last Supper, we're told He sets aside His outer garment, takes up a towel, pours water into a basin, gets on His hands and knees and begins to literally wash His disciples' dust-crusts, fungus-infected, sweat-stanky feet.
1. What's the point? Again, you don't come to this table already cleaned up. You come to this table to get cleaned up . . . by grace!
 - a. So listen to me, some of you feeling unclean, unworthy, sinful—you're right, you are, but that's the point this table! To take care of that and bring you into fellowship with God through the sacrifice of Christ.

(2) Carried On in the Spirit

- A. With this I just mean to say that now, some 2000 years after Christ actually walked the earth, we may wonder what Fellowship with Him around the table of the Lord's Supper really means. For these disciples, Jesus was physically present, but what about for us?
- B. You may know that the Catholic church has tried to make the case that Jesus is still somehow physically present under the form of this bread and wine with their doctrine of transubstantiation.

1. By their reckoning when the Eucharist is consecrated by a priest it really becomes the body and blood of Jesus and only appears to us as bread and wine. So He is still physically present with us around the table in this meal they would say.

SYMBOLIC

- A. But as a Protestant that's obviously not my read on this. I think that's to take Jesus' words too wooden-literally here. I think, instead, with the bread and cup here He's speaking symbolically, representationally.
- B. Remember, contextually, this is the Passover meal, and as I said last time, each part of this meal as it was originally celebrated would be interpreted along the way and you'd explain what each element represented.
 1. So, in the original meal, the head of the household would hold up the unleavened bread and say: "This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate when they came from Egypt."
 - a. Now, when the dad said this, were all those sitting around the table to think he was somehow literally holding bread that was now over a thousand years old—remnants of that which Israel really did eat in the wilderness and things? No, of course not. They watched it baking in the oven earlier that day. They knew it was symbolic—this bread represented that bread and reminded them of it.
- C. And so it is I think when Jesus, in the context of this meal, says: "This bread is my body" or "this cup is the new covenant in my blood"—He's not saying it's literally His body in His hands there, or literally His blood in the cup. He's saying these things symbolize and represent Me—My body broken, My blood poured out . . . for you!
- D. It's not altogether different from ways Jesus talks elsewhere in the gospels—when He says things like:
 1. "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).
 2. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).
 3. "I am the door [of the sheep]. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).
 4. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19)—and John tells us He's talking not about the literal temple but about His body as the temple. All that the temple stood for He is the fulfillment of it. And the same thing is being said here about the Passover: It's all fulfilled in Me.
 - a. In these various instances, we understand intuitively He's speaking in metaphor and symbol and not with wooden-literality.

SPIRITUAL

A. But there is something more to this meal and the fellowship we have with Jesus than some mere symbolic thing right? To stop there and simply make this a memorial meal where we look back at what Jesus has done, is to miss the fact that He is presently with us, communing by His Spirit in and through this meal.

1. It's not just symbolic then, there's a spiritual fellowship to be had as we come to the table. We truly engage in these moments with Christ who is present. And that's why I say here that this fellowship is "Carried On in the Spirit." I think in the same that Jesus says, "[W]here two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt. 18:20), so too He's present spiritually in some special way to fellowship with us in and through this meal.

a. This is why the old Puritan pastor Richard Baxter would say: "Nowhere is God so near to man as in Jesus Christ; and nowhere is Christ so familiarly represented to us, as in this holy sacrament."

PHYSICAL (IN A DIFFERENT SENSE)

A. The last thing I'd say on this is that there is still a physical element to it, isn't there? No we don't understand this physicality in the way that Catholics might, but there is still something physical to the Lord's Supper. And that's really an important part of it.

B. Some have called the Lord's Supper a "sermon for the senses."

1. The idea is: It's one thing to talk about the gospel and God's grace and it's another to touch it and taste it. So God gives us a sort of object lesson here. He makes His love physical.

a. It's the difference, perhaps between your spouse merely telling you that he loves you with words, over the phone or something, and then actually coming into the room where you're sitting and putting his arms around you.

i. In the gospel God declares His love, around the table of the Lord's Supper He shows it to us.

C. You know Levi, my son, we read Him books about Jesus and things, and we talk about how Jesus can come into His life and into His heart. And Megan told me that the other day, He asked If Jesus is in my heart why can't He just come out for a little while I want to see Him. You see, He wanted something physical. And we all do.

1. And, while the bread and the cup aren't Jesus Himself physically, it is a way He manifests Himself to us and comes and puts His arm around us. It's grace in tangible form.

(3) Enjoyed with Others

A. Here's the next thing I should say about this idea of Fellowship here. It is fellowship with God, certainly, and fundamentally so, but it is a fellowship with God that is enjoyed and shared . . . with others.

1. After all, Jesus doesn't pull His disciples aside here one by one for this meal. He invites them all to come in and sit down together.
 - a. And when He commands the church to "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19), the verb in the Greek there is second person plural ("you all")—meaning: this meal, the Lord's Supper is to be taken with other believers, together, in fellowship not just with God, then, but also with one another.

- B. The cross is the basis of our new community. We are not only brought into covenant relation with God here at this table, we are, by extrapolation brought into covenant relationship with each other as His holy people.
 1. This is one of the reasons why we call membership here "Covenant" Membership. This is why we welcome in new members on the same Sundays that we formally partake of the Lord's Supper all together as one body.
 - a. You see, we're trying to affirm this reality that we are a New Covenant people, that around this table, God, through the death and resurrection of His Son, enters into covenant with us, individually and corporately, together. This not just a meal we eat alone with God, we eat it with God with each other.

- C. Let me read to you a bit from what we call the Covenant Membership Expansion Packet where I go into more detail on this. I want to you see it. Here I'm trying to give rationale for why we call it "Covenant" Membership and I say this . . . "We often don't realize it, but when God brings people into covenant with Himself, He always brings them into covenant with one another as well.

The easiest place to see this is with Jesus at the Lord's Supper. Jesus is sitting down around the table with His guys to celebrate the Passover one last time. The shadow of the cross is heavy upon Him. Death has Him by the ankles. He already knows He's going to be betrayed by Judas and abandoned by the others—every last one of them will soon scatter to save his own neck.

And yet Jesus doesn't pull away from them. No! He takes up the bread and the cup, and He presses in, He covenants with them: "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20b). He makes the bread and cup symbols of His body and blood and says: "This is how much I love you...to death. I'm with you in this...to the end. . . ."

But now here's the amazing thing: this covenant Christ makes with us, sets up our covenant with one another. Because it's around a table that this takes place. And there are others seated around this table. It's not just Him doing this with each person individually. Suddenly the disciples look around and they realize: "We are in this thing with Him together."

Paul would later spell out this reality for the local church in Corinth: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation [Gk. koinonia = 'fellowship'] in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16–17).

Do you see what he just did? He took the elements that Christ used as signs of His covenant with us and he made them signs of our covenant with one another! The bread which signifies His body broken for us (going from one to many), at the same time signifies His church uniting in Him (going from many to one). He gave His life on the cross so that He might not only call us into covenant with Himself, but into covenant with one another!

We meet around this table—like a family dinner—and we feast on the elements that symbolize Christ's death on a cross for us. . . .

So as we come to the table on Sundays to partake of the bread and the fruit of the vine, by all means, look up at your Savior. Stand in awe of the cross whereby He receives and covenants with sinners like us. But don't forget to stop and look around at the brothers and sisters gathered around the table with you—at your family in Christ. When Christ brings us into covenant with Himself, He brings us into covenant with one another!

That's why we're calling this "Covenant" Membership.

- D. I mention in this the idea that the Lord's Supper is a family meal. And I suppose that's the last thing I wish to bring out on this point. The Passover, where would it be celebrated year after by the Jews? In their homes, with their families. So what's happening here? Why has Jesus pulled these guys away from their families to do this together?
1. Well, He's hinting at the fact that He's establishing a new family, the children of God, where the bond is established not merely by our own blood, but by His and the Spirit of adoption that brings us in and knits us together.

(4) A Foretaste of the End

- A. The last thing I'd say on this idea of the Fellowship we experience with Jesus in and through this meal here is that it's a foretaste of the end.
1. I brought this up last time, but Jesus in a few places makes it plain, this meal isn't the climax for Him, it's really just the beginning, it's just a little appetizer, a little foretaste of the Messianic Banquet, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb He will eat with us when the kingdom of God has come in full at the end of the age.
- B. So I want you to think of the meal in this way.
1. It's an appetizer. The welcome and fellowship you have with Jesus here by the Spirit with the family of God.
 2. It's like a kid peeling back the wrapping paper of his gifts under the tree a few week's out from Christmas. He can see what's coming, but it's not yet his to fully enjoy.
 3. Or to give you one final image for it, to partake of this meal now is like experiencing the warmth of a Spring day in the dead of Winter. I say this, because, it's what I was experiencing even as I was preparing this sermon. It's been uncharacteristically warm, right, and though we need rain, I welcomed the sun and I went outside and read and sat in its warmth.
 - a. And I just thought this what communion is. It's the in-breaking of Spring a few months before its time. It's a foretaste of the fullness of fellowship and joy that will be ours with our Savior in the end.
- C. So now, listen, I don't know where you're at with Jesus—some of you stiff-arming, some of you walking solid, some of you maybe never bent the knee, repented and trusted.
1. I don't know where you are, but I know where Jesus is and what He's doing. It's what He's talking about in [Rev 3:20](#): "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

- a. So come, come dirty, come desperate, come tired, come weak, come guilty, come ashamed, come hungry, come thirsty, come to the table and eat and drink. There's grace and fellowship for you here!