

The Communion Meal

Series: The Sacraments

August 6, 2013 – Brad Bailey

Intro

Identity is powerful. Identity may be the **most powerful force in our lives...and yet the most unrooted.**

We tend to live out of some combination of who we have been... are expected to be... want to be... and should be.

And I have found two things to be true... in the work of God.

Nothing has been more powerful in the deepest places than the love of God. And... secondly... it is hard to stay rooted in that love.

Many of us have experienced something of the love of God... God wants a relationship... even the reality that God has extended his hand of covenant. And that relationship is at the very root of our existence. But we may find it hard to stay rooted in that reality. God knows this. Jesus knows this.

Today we are going to **begin two weeks of engaging that which roots us in union with God...** that is what are often referred to as the **sacraments.**

The word "sacrament"... refers to that which is sacred.

Think of **what the temple had been** in the **life of Israel...** that **sacred space....where a union with God is made possible... a potential that is always established by God. [1]**

It is not that which we create...but that which God creates... and ordains... which is why these **sacraments** are also referred to as **ordinances...** because they are **recognized as ordained by God. [2]**

In particular...we are engaging the **two main sacraments** recognized across the historic church... that of **Baptism** and **Communion ...or The Lord's Supper.**

They are indeed... a profound sign and symbol of covenant.... which God had ordained.

They are connected to something ultimate... the very nature of actual life... life with God....in ways which are far more profound and powerful than we tend to grasp.

My wife and I recently **celebrated the anniversary of our marriage...** that which we embraced as a covenant... it **began on the day** of our wedding... much like a baptism... public... but is then continually remembered....on anniversaries among other times. In a similar way... Baptism demonstrates our initial identification with Christ and His church.

Communion (The Lord's Supper) celebrates our continual identification with Christ and His church.

Today... we are going to engage the sacrament of Communion and next week baptism.

In what we know now as "The Last Supper," Jesus shared the Passover meal with his closest followers on the night he was betrayed. [3]

At that meal, Jesus taught his disciples that the Passover was a sign that pointed to Him. He was the spotless lamb whose body would be broken and whose blood would be shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 26:26-29

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

The Apostle Paul also wrote about this to the early church,

1 Corinthians 11:23-29

I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

PRAYER

What we see is that **Jesus instituted** that which would be understood as the **central act of Christian worship**.

Jesus began by giving a prayer of thanks... and that is why many refer to this as **The Eucharist** ...from the Greek eucharistia for "thanksgiving."

It is often referred to as the **Lord's Supper**... because it was initiated by the Lord... by Jesus himself.

And it is often referred to as **Communion**...because at the center sharing in union with God. It is our co-union.

Through this text we just had read, there is a Greek word that actually **shows up five times**. The Greek word is *synerchomai*, which means to **bring together**, to **come together**, to **unite**, or to **connect together**. It's translated in different ways through the text, so when you're reading it in English, it's not as striking, but it's the theme.

These elements have now been given a sacred meaning... that which **connects things** that otherwise would be fragmented. They transcend that which is otherwise separated. In order to understand what it means to observe the Lord's Supper and to have it really shape your character and change your life, we need to **recognize this transcendent quality... to recognize what God is connecting**.

Let me just go over four that Paul talks about, four ways the Lord's Supper connects things: *it connects the present to the past, it connects your soul to God, it connects the individual to community, and it connects your life story to the future.*

The Communion Meal...

1. Connects the present to the past. (Transcends time)

First thing we learn here is the **Lord's Supper connects the present to the past**, because it immediately **connects you to the night in which he was betrayed**. Always, whenever we observe the Lord's Supper, we're not just talking about the present; we're remembering the Last Supper of Jesus with the disciples, the night in which he was betrayed.

Let's go back to that night. What kind of night was it? It was a Passover night. It was a Passover meal.

At Passover, usually, one of the kids is asked a question. **"Why is this night different than all other nights?"** It's because it was **referring back to the great act of liberation in which God brought the Israelites out of Egypt**.

Here's what happened at Passover. The Israelites were slaves. **The king of Egypt, Pharaoh, would not liberate them**; therefore, God sent the angel of death to Egypt. **This angel of death was actually judgment day scrolled forward**. What God was doing ... On a mini scale, he was **bringing down the sort of divine justice which is something that at the end of time on judgment day is going to put everything to rights**.

However, because of what Egypt had done, God allowed a sort of scroll forward of judgment day. **The Israelites were human beings, like the Egyptians**. They were as **subject to divine justice and divine judgment** as anybody else. So how were they going to survive the angel of death? Here's what God said to them.

"In every home, the Israelite families must come together and must eat a meal. They must slay a lamb, eat the lamb, and put the blood on the doorposts of their homes. They take shelter under the blood of the lamb; the lamb dies instead of anyone inside the home. So when the angel of death comes and sees the blood on the doorposts, the angel of death will pass over the family, and they'll be saved."

As a result, because they took shelter under the blood of the lamb, because the lamb died instead of anyone inside the home, the Israelites were saved. They were liberated. They were brought out.

Passover. Moses, in **Exodus 12 says**, "Therefore, there must be a **perpetual memorial** that must never be changed, that once a year this meal **will remember that incredible, that wonderful, that great liberation**," until the night on which Jesus was betrayed, because on the night he was betrayed, it was a Passover night, and he was celebrating the Passover with his disciples.

He was presiding, but **he immediately began to make changes**, ... instead of saying, as the presider might say, "This is the bread of *our* affliction that we ate in the wilderness," he took the unleavened bread and said, "This is my body, this is the bread of *my* affliction, broken for you."

What the **commemoration of Passover did not include... was the meat of the lamb**.

Why? Because those sweet lambs couldn't ultimately take away the sins of the world.

That's the reason why Isaiah says in this famous place in Isaiah 53, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned each to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." Who is this? Isaiah doesn't tell us. He calls this one the suffering servant.

The point is Isaiah and the other prophets were saying, "Those lambs did not take away the sin of Israel. They represented someone else, some other substitute." On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus Christ said, "I am he."

In John 1:29... John the Baptist called Jesus "the lamb of God."

At the last supper, **Jesus was talking about himself** telling them by his death **he would be taking away the sin of the world**.

On that night, Jesus Christ was saying, “My death is the climactic event toward which everything in the history of salvation has been moving until now. Every sacrifice, every liberation, every prophet, every priest, every king, every deliverer has all been pointing to *me*, because tonight I’m not just going to deliver you from this or that slavery, this or that physical or social or economic or partial problem. I’m going to deal with sin and death itself tonight. This is the night unlike all other nights.”

The Passover Meal had connected the past to the present lives... it was the very basis by which they lived... because of what God provided on that night... the judgment of death had passed over...but it was a story without an real end...in fact it was waiting for what it pointed to.

When Jesus prepared to be the final sacrifice... he reconstituted that meal... to connect this final sacrifice to all who would receive these elements.

When you take the bread and the cup, there’s a direct connection between what’s happening now and what happened on that night.

Some may know that the Catholic stream of the Christian Faith has held the belief that the elements actually become the body and blood of Christ... because the covenant is indeed on of real flesh and blood.

While the Protestant stream had not deemed such to physical take place... it has often spoken of this as symbolic.

But it is more than simply a symbol at hand.

What we miss is that we think only in terms of a symbol of something that happened in the past. But in God... it was a timeless sacrifice that brings past and present and future into the act.

There is something spiritually present... not because of the substance...but because of time.

God exists outside of time. So what God did he also does

Christ is not only the lamb who WAS slain...but remains that which is forever that saving sacrifice.

When he rose from the dead... his resurrected body was new...but those who saw him...still saw the scars.

When John is given a vision of heaven... Jesus is worshipped as the lamb who was slain.

And so in this Communion meal... we are engaging the timeless presence of Christ’s sacrifice.

The Communion Meal...

2. Connects your soul to God (Transcends the separation of our sin)

“When he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ After supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”

At the center of this meal is the means of a **new covenant.**

It’s a **covenant of grace**... and of **receiving grace.**

It’s important to realize...that when we receive the bread and juice... his body and blood...we are not obtaining grace. **Grace is grace because it is not obtainable.** You don’t earn it. You don’t do anything to receive it. It is given. That’s why it’s grace. **It’s given freely** and why faith is the **God ordained means for salvation.** It is because that it doesn’t involve what we do. It is faith in what He has done. He has lived the life we could not live. He has died a death as a substitute on our behalf on our behalf, so that when we trust in Him, His righteousness is

granted to us. It is beautiful, marvelous grace, and as soon as we add one step to do this in order to receive grace, then we undercut grace.

It's the same picture in the Passover when the old covenant, they would have the Passover meal as a remembrance. They would remember the night when they put blood over the doorposts of their homes, and God passed over, did not bring judgment on that home because there was a blood of a lamb over that. They remembered, every time they celebrated the Passover meal, they looked back, and they said, "Yes, God delivered us by the blood of the lamb from underneath His judgment."

It's important to realize that **this is spiritual...not magical**. This is **not about the elements having power**...but the grace of this timeless death that has power.

He doesn't just say, "Eat it and drink it," because then that would be, I think, the Catholic view that says you automatically have grace. **He says, "Eat and drink in remembrance ..."**

He is speaking of something more than "remember" in the way we use that English word. We tend to think...did I remember where I left my keys. But in the Hebrew language and culture... to remember, in Biblical thought, means to allow that which it is **more than merely recall**. It means to allow that which was rendered in past to bear it's full potency and vitality into the present.

It is about **being infused with the reality** of his death.

As Tim Keller notes, In order to get back to the power of it, you need to realize what the opposite of remember is. **Dismember**.

Sounds gross. When you think of dismember, you're **thinking of hands and fingers and arms** and legs cut off, right? Right, because the word member means a body part. To remember means not just to recall; **it means to graft**. It means to **sew**. It means to **fuse**. It means to take something that is actually not part of your being and make it part of your being again.

It means that whether I am I living in my own self claiming pride ...or my own self perceiving despair... I receive him...and unity with God.

It means I believe Jesus Christ gave himself for you, that the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the Lord of the universe valued you and was willing to lose everything for you, or you believe it up here, and you need to remember it. **You need to eat it. You need to digest it. It needs to become part of you. It needs to saturate you.**

It needs to come in and shape the way in which you think of yourself and think of the world and think of the people around you and think of everything.

Mother Teresa [4]

" Jesus made himself bread, to satisfy our hunger for God. In each of our lives Jesus comes as the Bread of Life—to be eaten, to be consumed by us. He also comes as the Hungry One, hoping to be fed with the bread of our life, with our hearts that love and our hands that serve." - Mother Teresa

It means he's in your hands, he's in your heart, and he's in your life. We are receiving his spirit.

The Communion Meal...

3. Connects the individual to community (Transcends our human divisions)

When Jesus ate the Last Supper with his disciples, those reclining next to him were people from different walks of life. They didn't share the same socioeconomic backgrounds, careers, skill sets, or family situations.

We can't miss the communal nature of this meal. At the very heart...it was **known as the common meal**... the shared meal...because everyone was united by the grace of Christ. [5]

As Paul described in this same letter to the Corinthians...

Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.
– 1 Corinthians 10:17

That is why in our initial passage by Paul... he speaks of the need to recognize this unity.... Because the church he was writing to...the church at Corinth.... was full of divisions... and disregard for others.

The main issue in Paul's letter is that people were taking the holy sacrament in a way that separated people into social classes instead of uniting them as one.

When first-century Christians gathered to eat, bread and wine weren't the only items on the menu. They shared an agape meal, or "love feast"—an entire meal meant to be a time of fellowship and encouragement. The Lord's Supper happened in the context of this agape meal. The problem in Corinth was that those in higher social classes were treating the Christian love feast like a pagan banquet, during which the wealthy ate first and consumed the finest parts of the meal, leaving those who were socially and economically disadvantaged to scrape a meal together from the leftovers.

Paul regarded this as a humiliation of the community and an abuse of the Supper of the Lord, whose own example contradicts such status divisions. He tells the people they are despising the church and undermining the gospel. **Jesus had given his life to serving the marginalized, the overlooked, and the diseased. And so to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way that reinforces classism or segregation is to reject its very meaning.**

That's why Paul informs the Corinthian church that they are sinning against the very "body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27). He goes on to give this command: "When you gather to eat, you should all eat together" (v. 33). What Paul intends here is for Christians to honor Christ by honoring one another.

This table calls us to come and **join that which unites us** by **transcending our divisions**.

It calls us to **confront our separation**... our **superiority**... our **inferiority**.

The Communion Meal... is that which invites each of us into community... to a table that Jesus has established.

A table that does not define us by the differences that so often divide us.

A table that sees his body...once sacrificed...and now embodied in us and our unity. For in Christ... Paul had declared...there is no longer to be any superiority between male or female... between Jew or Gentile...that is any ethnicity... or between slave and free...that is... no superiority rooted in our socioeconomic positions.

And so we are to examine ourselves... to surrender afresh that which we may identify with in a posture of separation or superiority...and even inferiority.

This meal is a "multiethnic, multigenerational, and multi-socioeconomic" feast. [6]

According to Jesus, the oneness of his people **provides a sign to the world** that God the Father sent him. "I [am] in them and you [are] in me," Jesus prayed on the night he was betrayed, **"so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me"** (John 17:23).

...And this leads to the final connection.

The Communion Meal...

4. Connects your life story to the future (Transcends the current state of this world)

Jesus said we should share in this meal until when?

1 Corinthians 11:26

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Until he comes again and culminates what he has begun. [7]

Communion with God—the primary purpose of our existence—is so often symbolized by eating, drinking, and feasting. And it all **culminates in what is described as the ultimate feast.**

The future culmination of God's story...is described in the Book of Revelation... as a great feast...sometimes known as the **marriage supper of the Lamb** (Rev. 19:7–10). Among the Jews, a **feast with family and friends followed the initial wedding ceremony**. The Lord's Supper points to a greater and better marriage banquet when all of God's people throughout all time will gather with Jesus to celebrate the marriage covenant he has made with us—the church—as his bride.

Here's the end of the book of Revelation.

"Then the angel said to me, 'Write: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"' [...] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe [away] every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' ['Behold!' he says.] 'I am making [all things] new!' "

This communion meal... points to this future.

And the focus is not on the elements of the meal itself... though described as a feast...but on the celebration of what is being celebrated...that we are finally home...in the ultimate union we have been created for.

In the sense the Communion Meal is like a care package from home... that reminds me that I am not home.

CLOSING:

In Luke's account of that night...he includes how Jesus began this meal with his disciples saying:

"I have longed to have this meal with you," he said. "I promise I will not eat of it again until it's fulfilled in the kingdom."

Do you hear the heart of Jesus...the heart of heaven?

If there's anything that can touch the heart of the Father, it's the thought of his kids coming home.

In communion... we come to a sobering reality... the sacrifice of God...but it is a sacrifice God made because of His love for us.

He is saying....this is who you are.

INVITATION:

In a moment we will conclude with an opportunity to receive these sacred elements.

Invite you to allow your heart to recognize the transcendent nature of this sacred meal.

Let us come to this table...

That transcends time... where we engage the sacrifice that is timeless.

That transcends the separation of sin.

That transcends our divisions and unites us.

That transcends our circumstances... by rooting us in our ultimate destiny.

Some of you may not have received Christ as Savior and Lord... you can simply stay seated as others partake... without any shame.

For some...this may be that opportunity to receive him...

PRAY

Resources:

I have drawn extensively from the framework and points Tim Keller provided in his message on Communion entitled *The Supper* (Keller, T. J. (2013). [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#)). There are sections of these notes that are taken directly from portions of Tim's work. However, I do not speak directly from notes, so it was the general thoughts that were actually communicated in briefer ways. Also, though not used much, two resources I found personally potent were: Brent Curtis (*Meeting God At The Communion Table*) and *The Lord's Supper Is a Multiethnic Love Feast: Why our church emphasizes a meal where all are welcome*. Jamaal E. Williams And Timothy Paul Jones, June 12, 2023 - [here](#)

Notes:

1. Guy Prentiss Waters's book [The Lord's Supper as a Sign and Meal of the New Covenant](#) appears to provide a thorough recapturing of the deep meaning of covenant, the connections to them, and the Lord's Supper as culmination. (I have only read synopsis and reviews)

His three-part definition of covenant as (1) a "sovereign administration of promises with corresponding obligations," that (2) solemnly ratifies a pre-existing, elective relationship (3) and deals with "life and death issues" (21–31).

Waters next lays the foundation for the Supper as a covenant sign by describing how God gave a sign for each previous covenant: the tree of life for the Adamic, the rainbow

for the Noahic, circumcision for the Abrahamic, Passover for the Mosaic. These signs were designed to strengthen the faith of covenant members by appealing to their five senses. For example, every time Noah saw a rainbow, and every time we take the bread in our mouths, God was (and is) tangibly reminding them (and us) of his promises.

2. Some have preferred the word sacrament...and others speak of these as ordinances... and both are fitting.

Sacrament is from the Latin *sacramentum*, meaning a soldier's sacred oath of allegiance. And when we say "ordinance," it simply means that it was ordained by the Lord.

Louis Berkhof, writes: "A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which by sensible signs the grace of God in Christ, and the benefits of the covenant of grace, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers, and these, in turn, give expression to their faith and allegiance to God" (*Systematic Theology*).

3. For those less familiar, "The Gospels of Matthew (26.26), Mark (14.22), and Luke (22.14) all mention the last meal that Jesus ate with his disciples the evening before his death. Each Gospel describes Jesus thanking God or blessing the bread and the cup, and passing them on to his disciples saying that the bread is his body and the cup is the blood of his covenant, or the new covenant by his blood. In Luke 22:19, Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me. The gospel of John is not about the meal, but rather about the teaching and the events that occurred that evening. Paul's letters constitute the first testimony we have, and in 1 Corinthians 11:20 he refers to an event in the life of the Church called "the Lord's Supper" probably because it was instituted or ordained by the Lord Jesus, and because it celebrates by its meaning the memory of the Lord's death."
– From John Piper

4. From "Total Surrender" by Mother Teresa

Another related quote: "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." - Richard Baxter; Taken from [J.I. Packer, Puritan Idea of Communion with God, p. 116.](#)

5. As John Piper describes,

"It has public significance. This is not the ritual of a secret cult with magical powers. It is a public act of worship performed by the assembly of the Church. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 11:26, Paul says: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you announce death of the Lord, until he comes. So there is an aspect of proclaiming the gospel in the Lord's Supper. The proclamation implies that this is not a private act. We do not prevent a single person from having the Lord's Supper in a nursing home or hospital, but this individual celebration is exceptional, and not the biblical standard. Five times in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul speaks of the Church "coming together" to take the Lord's Supper."

6. Drawn from: The Lord's Supper Is a Multiethnic Love Feast: Why our church emphasizes a meal where all are welcome. Jamaal E. Williams And Timothy Paul Jones, June 12, 2023 - [here](#)

7. "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup" ... that is any and every potential moment in your life... when you receive his sacrificial death... it is pointing to what awaits. As N.T. Wright states: "The present moment ('whenever') somehow holds together the one-off past event ('the Lord's death') and the great future when God's world will be remade under Jesus' loving rule ('until he comes')." - [*The Meal Jesus Gave Us, Revised Edition*](#)