

12. The Book of Acts—2:42

(7/15/26)

We are currently in the third major section of chapter 2 which runs from verses 42-47, a section we're calling—**“The Practice of the Early Church”**:

Acts 2:42 (NKJV)

⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

This section gives us the *'blueprint'* or pattern for church life—and I believe the main reason the early church was so strong and effective was because it kept the main thing the main thing!

They didn't allow themselves to get distracted from the basics and lose their focus as to what Jesus called them to be and do.

“And they continued steadfastly...in the breaking of bread.”

“The breaking of bread” is an expression used in the NT that can refer to a formal Communion service (partaking of the bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus' death on the cross)—or to simply sharing a meal with someone or with multiple people in a home or in a church (potluck).

How do we know which is which? The context would indicate which one is in view.

Here it obviously refers to the Lord's Supper (Communion), since it would be kind of dumb to say that they **“continued steadfastly eating their meals.”**

We learn from Acts 20:7 that the practice of the early church was to have a *'love feast'* on the first day of the week (Sunday) where at one point they would celebrate the Lord's Supper (Communion) as an expression of God's love for them and their love for each other.

This was supposed to be, not only a remembrance of what Jesus did for them by dying on the cross (*"as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup do it in remembrance of Me."*—1 Cor. 11:24-25)—but it was also to celebrate their oneness with each other as member of Jesus' Body, the Church.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:16–17—

1 Corinthians 10:16–17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? ¹⁷ For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

And so, Communion (the Lord's Supper) was to celebrate their unity with one another—and yet it was having the opposite effect:

1 Corinthians 11:17–18, 20-22 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it...²⁰ Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. ²¹ For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*. [Comment]

Paul is basically saying, *"When you come together in one place, it is not possible for you to eat the Lord's Supper—not like the way you're doing it!"*

In other words, *"It's impossible for you to eat the Lord's Supper in the proper and holy way because of the way you're conducting your so-called 'love feast' which precedes it."*

One commentator said—

"Some got there early and stuffed themselves leaving little or nothing left for those who got there late. The wealthier members brought good food and sat together and ate while the poorer

members (usually slaves) were left to eat scrapes and go away hungry. Others were even drinking the wine intended for communion and were getting drunk. And since the Lord's Supper often followed the love feast, they would still be drunk when they sat down to partake of the Lord's Supper.

The original idea of the "agape feast" was sharing, but that idea had been lost. If they were not going to share in true fellowship, they should have eaten at home. What they were doing was fracturing and rupturing the church which caused Paul to say, 'Shall I praise you in this?' 'I praise you not!'"

Most conservative scholars agree that 1 Corinthians probably was written *before* any of the gospels.

If that's true, Paul's account here is the first biblical record of the institution of the Lord's Supper and includes direct quotations from Jesus.

Paul wasn't there in the upper room, of course, the night Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper—so how did he know what went on?

He tells us in 1 Cor. 11:23 that he received this information directly from the Lord through revelation.

The phrase **"...the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed..." (1 Cor. 11:23)** gives the historical setting, which many of the believers may not have known, because, as just noted, probably none of the gospels were yet written.

The literal rendering is *"While He was being betrayed."*

So, while Judas was gone carrying out his betrayal, Jesus was celebrating the Passover dinner with His disciples in the upper room.

Neither Paul nor the gospel writers give us the details of a typical Passover meal choosing rather to focus on Jesus' institution of the new meal, the new supper, which now supersedes the old meal (Passover).

Since Jesus and His disciples were observing the Passover meal with each other (during which Jesus instituted Communion)—let's look at a typical Jewish Passover Seder.

The Passover *Seder* (which in Hebrew means “*order*” as in “*order of events*”) is built around the drinking of 4 different cups of wine that take place at different points in the order of the Passover meal.

To **begin the meal** the father or head of the family takes the **first cup** of wine called the **Cup of Sanctification** and raises it toward heaven and recites the Kiddush (the prayer of sanctification) to set the day apart to God.

After the father or head of the family or host took the cup and prayed over it—he drank from it and then shared it with those at the table.

The second ceremony of the Seder is known as the “*washing of the hands.*”

One of the family members brings a pitcher of water, a bowl, and a towel to each person at the table to wash his hands—the ceremony is a symbolic act of *purification*.

It was probably this ceremony in the Seder that Jesus used to wash the disciple's feet and teach them a powerful lesson about humility and servanthood.

After the hands are washed, the *karpas* (green vegetable) is dipped into the salt water and eaten.

The green leafy vegetable, usually parsley, is used to symbolize the initial flourishing of the Israelites in Egypt.

But then the salt-water is a reminder of the tears of pain and suffering shed by the Jewish people during their years of slavery in Egypt.

Next the leader takes the **middle matzah** (there are 3 sheets of matzah used in the Passover meal) breaks it in half, replaces half and hides the other half (called the ‘afikomen’) which will then be brought back later in the meal to illustrate a very important truth.

“Surprisingly, *Afikomen* is not Hebrew, but a Greek word, the precise meaning of which is difficult to determine. Some have proposed the derivation of this word from the Greek verb meaning “*I have come*.”

At this point the youngest asks, “*Why is this night different from every other night?*” followed by **4 questions**:

- 1) “*On every other night we eat bread leavened and unleavened, but on this night, we eat only unleavened bread.*”
- 2) “*On every other night we eat different kinds of herbs, but on this night, we eat only bitter herbs.*”
- 3) “*On every other night we don’t dip even once in the sop, but on this night, we dip not once but twice.*”
- 4) “*On every other night we eat sitting and reclining, but on this night, we eat only reclining.*”

(This was probably skipped in the Passover in the upper room with Jesus and His disciples.)

And then at this point in the Seder, they would sing Psalm 113 and 114.

Psalms 113 to 118 are the Hillel psalms (the psalms of praise)—these were sung during the Passover feast but at this point they would only sing Psalm 113 and 114.

Next the second cup of wine called the **Cup of Deliverance** is poured and in response to the 4 questions—a lengthy narrative of the Passover story begins as told by the father or head of the family.

In preparation for the meal, everyone present washes their hands a second time for ceremonial cleansing.

Then each person must eat a piece of matzah dipped in the *horseradish* (to produce tears reminding them of their bitter years of slavery in Egypt) and then they dipped in *charoset*.

Charoset is a paste-like mixture of apples (or other fruits), nuts and sweet wine or honey and represents the mortar used by the Israelite slaves when they laid bricks used to build Pharaoh's monuments.

The sweetness of the charoset is a reminder of the sweetness of God's eventual redemption out of their bitter slavery.

Now here we need to look at John's gospel—

John 13:18–19, 21–27, 30 (NKJV)

¹⁸ “I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘*He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.*’” ¹⁹ Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am *He*...

²¹ When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” ²² Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. ²³ Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved [John]. ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. ²⁵ Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped *it*.” And having dipped the bread, He gave *it* to Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon. ²⁷ Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly”...

³⁰ Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.”

I believe the reference in verse 26 to Jesus dipping the bread (matzah)—was a reference to Jesus dipping the bread in the *charoet* which He then gave to Judas who was close enough (reclining right behind Him) for Jesus to hand it to him.

As Jesus handed the bread to Judas, as Matthew records, Judas responded—“*Surely not I Rabbi?!’*”, to which Jesus answered, “*Yes, it’s you. Do what you’re planning to do quickly.*”

But you see, this dialogue had to take place quietly enough for the other disciples not to hear it as they were talking among themselves who the traitor would be.

I say that because I believe that if the Lord had announced loudly enough for all of them to hear that it was Judas—I don’t think he would have made it out of there alive!

If this is accurate and the order is correct then it means that Judas left the room to carry out his betrayal of Jesus *before* the dinner part of the Seder began—which means Judas was not there when the Lord instituted Communion.

Communion is only for true believers in Christ and must not be partaken of by unbelievers or even Christians with unconfessed sin—hence Paul’s warning in 1Cor.11:27-29.

Next, the dinner is served—in Jesus’ day, it would have consisted of roasted lamb, served with bitter herbs and matzah.

One Jewish writer tells us—

“While a roasted lamb bone is traditionally used (in the Passover Seder), any piece of roasted meat may be used. Most Jewish families use a shank bone (some families use chicken or turkey neck), which they roast completely in the oven and then char over an open flame on their stoves. Unlike the other foods on the Seder plate, the shank bone is never eaten. Instead, it remains as a visual reminder of those monumental moments right before the Exodus.”

Matthew 26:26 (NKJV)

²⁶ And as they were eating [the dinner], Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

This, I believe, corresponds to the next part of the Passover meal—the bringing back of the afikomen.

Remember that 3 sheets of matzah are used in the Passover meal—but only the middle piece is broken and hidden to be brought back later in the meal.

Of course, this middle matzah represents Jesus (the Second or ‘Middle’ Person of the Trinity) and that it is broken (as He was on Calvary’s Cross), hidden only to be brought back later—which speaks of His First and Second Coming (Explain).

I believe it was the afikomen that Jesus broke and gave to His disciples when He said, “**Take, eat; this is my body.**”

(Mention how the matzah is *unleavened*, *striped* and *pierced* and how these relate to Jesus)

Matthew 26:27-28 (NKJV)

²⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

²⁸ For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

This brings us to the **third cup of wine** used in the Passover meal called the **Cup of Redemption** which is at this point in the meal poured and sipped.

It was here in the order of the Passover meal and with this **third cup** that Jesus instituted the **Lord’s Supper (Communion)**—

Luke 22:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

It was with this third cup—the Cup of Redemption, that Jesus chose to *remind* us of His blood shed for us on the cross—

1 Corinthians 11:25–26 (NKJV)

²⁵ In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in *remembrance* of Me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.

The remembrance that only the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world could redeem us to God and cause His judgment to ‘pass-over’ us.

Finally, they would pour and drink from the **fourth cup**—the **Cup of Praise**.

Jesus apparently didn’t drink this cup that night—

Matthew 26:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

That means that the Passover meal that Jesus observed with His disciples that night—was not finished!

Jesus said He wouldn’t drink of that forth cup—the cup of praise (sometimes called the ‘*cup of restoration*’; or ‘*the cup of the kingdom*’) until He drank it with all of us in the Kingdom—which means that we are all going to finish that Passover meal with Jesus someday!

They would then sing from **Psalm 118** to **officially end the Passover Seder**.

Matthew 26:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Again, it was the third cup that Jesus blessed, *the Cup of Redemption*, that He used to institute Communion.

1 Corinthians 11:24–25 (NKJV)

²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” ²⁵ In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.”

In the Greek the phrase, “And when He had given thanks...” is a participle of ‘*eucharisteō*’, from which we get *Eucharist*—the name by which some Christians refer to the Lord’s Supper.

In connection with ‘**the cup**’, He said that it was “**the new covenant in His blood**” (the Hebrew word ‘covenant’ means ‘to cut’—Explain)

This refers to the covenant that God promised to the nation of Israel in Jeremiah 31:31–33:

Jeremiah 31:31–33 (NKJV)

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. ³³ But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people...” [Comment on the difference between the Old and New Covenants]

The **new covenant** was ratified by the **blood of Christ**, and that is why He speaks of **the cup** as being “**the new covenant in His blood**”—the blood of His cross.

Now the instituting of Communion seems pretty straight forward—just as God had given the people of God under the Old Covenant a meal to remember how that, through the blood of the lamb, He had delivered them out of the bondage of Egyptian slavery.

He now gives the people of God under the New Covenant a meal to remember how that, through the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, He had delivered them out of the bondage of sin and death.

Simple, straightforward, clear and non-controversial—right? → Wrong!

As one commentator said—

“There have never been any words spoken by Jesus that have been fought over more fiercely by the followers of Christ than the words He spoke at the Last Supper when He took the bread and said, ‘**This is my body**’ and the wine and said, ‘**This is my blood.**’”

People have died for having the ‘wrong’ view of what those words mean.

What was Jesus really saying?

These words have given rise to four main interpretations which we will study next time.