

Come to the Table

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Transition: Paul Prays & Seats

Communion Elements on Stage

While everyone here in the house is saying “Hi” to each other as always we want to say “Hi” to you if you are joining us on our app or social channels. Today is a special day here in the house as we celebrate communion, so why don’t you grab some juice or wine or whatever you have in the house along with some bread or crackers and you can celebrate with us as we prepare our hearts for Easter.

Well, how’s everyone doing? As I just mentioned, we are going to celebrate communion today as we get ready for Easter next Sunday, don’t forget, two services times at 9:15 am and 11:00 am. But as we set out into what is known as Holy Week I want to preach a message I am calling:

Come to the Table.

That’s the invitation we all have from Jesus! Amen? We are all invited to His table to remember His sacrifice and to rejoice in the resurrection!

A couple years ago I was reading a book that connected the lunar landings with the cross and resurrection. And even though I grew up on the Space Coast I learned something new about the Apollo 11 mission. Apollo 11 was the spacecraft that landed the first two people on the moon on July 20th, 1969. When astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed the first thing they did was... wait! NASA wanted to give them some downtime after their flight so they would be well rested before taking the first ever moonwalk.

During this time Aldrin got on the comm and spoke to the ground crew back on Earth. This is what he said:

“I’d like to take this opportunity to ask every person listening in, wherever and wherever they may be, to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his or her own way.” – Buzz Aldrin

But when the radio transmission had ended, Aldrin—who was an elder in his church—read a verse from the Gospel of John and took communion. These are the:

{ACTUAL NOTES}

That Aldrin carried with him into space for his private communion service. Listen to him describe it:

“In the radio blackout, I opened the little plastic packages, which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon the wine curled slowly and gracefully up the side of the cup. Then I read the scripture, I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit, apart from me, you can do nothing.”

Now think about how significant this actually was. The very first liquid and the very first food ever consumed on the surface of the moon were the elements of communion!

But where does this ancient Christian ritual come from? If you said from Jesus at the Last Supper you’d be correct, BUT to really understand communion, you have to first understand the Jewish Passover. The Passover was instituted by God on the day that the Israelites were to be delivered from 400 years of

Egyptian slavery. This was over 1,400 years before Jesus when God established this special commemorative meal.

First God told the people to take an unblemished lamb from the flock and bring it into the house for four days prior to the Passover. During this four-day period, the family would naturally grow very attached to the lamb. But then on the fourth day, the father was to slaughter the lamb, then spread its blood on the two doorposts and over the entryway of the house. This blood was to serve as a sign that this home was protected and exempted from the judgment coming to Pharaoh. The death angel would “pass over” that home and not visit it.

Now, let's be honest, no matter how you slice it, it's a very disturbing story. It's the kind of story we might be tempted to sanitize, minimize, or even skip over all together. I mean can you imagine the kids' faces as they see their dad slit the throat of their new pet and paint it's blood over the door to the house! I'm just saying I bet they were on their best behavior after that. BUT as uncomfortable as this story might make us, Passover is pointing to something even more disturbing. It's pointing to a time when Jesus, the Lamb of God would offer Himself as a sacrifice for us! When His blood would be split and applied to a large piece of wood so that we all could be spared from judgment. There's simply no escaping the fact that Jesus' story is even more bloody, horrific, and gruesome. What I'm saying is simply this, if you try to sanitize the Passover story, you lose the meaning of the cross.

It was the same way with the very first sin. To provide a covering for Adam and Eve God had to make clothing from the skin of an animal, which meant the animal had to be sacrificed. For us to receive salvation from sin we needed the same covering. Blood must be shed. This is why the Bible says in both Old and New Testaments:

...without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. Leviticus 17:11, Hebrews 9:22

That's Leviticus 17 and Hebrews 9. AND you can try to soften it, water it down, even dilute it. It seems barbaric and pre-civilized, but you're mistaken if you think this was any less repulsive or difficult in Bible days. The killing of the family lamb and the blood spread all around the front door was just as repulsive to them as it would be to us. God intentionally chose an act that was repulsive and caused great feelings of loss because this is a foreshadowing of the sacrifice Jesus would make on the cross.

So, let's look a little deeper at how the Passover reveals Christ beginning with the *Lamb of God*. One of the curious things about Passover is the fact that the lamb had to be taken in and live with in the family until it was killed. God wanted them to get to know the lamb and to bond with it. AND when it was no longer just a lamb but their lamb, then it was to be sacrificed.

Fast forward to Jesus last week and He enters the city of Jerusalem five days before the lamb was to be killed as a part of Passover. But we also know from history that five days before the lamb was to be sacrificed, it was chosen! So, Jesus literally enters Jerusalem on lamb selection day. When Jesus enters the city, He enters as their Passover lamb. He's welcomed. He lives among them. He connects to them. Then he is rejected and slaughtered.

Also, if you go back to the institution of Passover, you discover that the lamb was to be slaughtered at a very specific time. The Hebrew literally says, “between the two evenings” and that's because the Jewish people had an early evening around 3 pm and a late evening around 5 pm. So, the lamb had to be killed between 3 & 5 in the afternoon. Do you remember what the Bible says in Matthew 27:46? Probably not, but that's what I'm good for, take a look:

At about **THREE O'CLOCK**, Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” which means “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

So, when did Jesus die? He died shortly after three o'clock on Friday at the very moment when the cries of the lamb could be heard coming from the temple for Passover. AND just in case that isn't clear enough, the Apostle Paul wrote this: (1 Cor 5:7b)

Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us.

Jesus disciple Peter added this: (1 Peter 1:18-20)

For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began.

Now, think about this. In the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned, God killed an animal in order to clothe their nakedness and cover their guilt. There was a one-to-one relationship between grace and sin. One animal for one person. On the night of the first Passover, one lamb was killed for each family gathering. So, it was one lamb for an entire family. Later at Mount Sinai, God taught them on the day of atonement, all the sin of Israel would be covered for one year through one lamb. That was one lamb for an entire nation. But when Jesus die on the cross, it's one lamb for the entire world! That's what God had been building toward and pointed to since the beginning of human history.

Next in the Jewish Passover we see the *Bread of Life*. As a part of Passover, the Jews were to eat unleavened bread or bread that lacked yeast. In order to make bread rise, you have to take something from a past loaf, that is fermented, you put that into the new loaf and the dough will rise. But on the occasion of Passover, as they're leaving Egypt, God wants nothing from the past to be brought into their present life. He wants them to leave Egypt behind once and for all. So, leaven, or yeast, became symbolic of sin or the past that clings to us. Unleavened bread means you're moving out of Egypt, and you want none of its corrupting influence to carry with you into the future.

BUT here's what's interesting. Immediately after Passover ends another Jewish festival called the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins. It begins Friday evening at sunset. So right after Passover, no sooner is the Lamb of God slaughtered than the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins.

Here's what would happen. The Jews would take some of their grain, the first fruits of their harvest, to the temple as a sacrifice. AND on Friday evening, Jesus was made an offering, a sacrifice to God. He's the seed of God, the seed that's offered as a sacrifice, and when He died, like a seed, He's planted in the ground. Then on that very first Easter, He arose and became the first fruits of the resurrected from the dead!

In fact, in the upper room on the night that Jesus is betrayed, where He institutes communion, He seems to be alluding to this very principle with His disciples. He says: (John 12:23-24)

“Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives.”

So, Jesus was buried. He's planted in the ground. But then on the third day He arose as the first fruits of the dead. In other words, there's more to come because He resurrected, one day we'll all be resurrected too! That's what first fruits are all about. There's more to come! That's the promise, the hope of Easter!

So, Jesus takes the bread from the Passover meal and says, no longer is this the bread to remind you of Egypt. It's now to remind you of My body, My body, which is given for you. This is what He says in Luke 22:19:

“This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

We can't fully appreciate this because we are not first century Jews, but Jesus is actually redefining Passover! He's saying the old covenant is over, the new covenant has begun. We're no longer looking to a lamb in Egypt, but the Lamb of God on a hill called Calvary!

SO, we've had the Lamb of God, the Bread of Life, now we have the *Cup of Salvation*. During Passover there were actually four cups of wine that were consumed over the course of the meal, which were centered on the four “I wills” of God. This is found in Exodus 6:6-7. God says:

“I am the Lord, and I WILL bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I WILL free you from being slaves to them, and I WILL redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I WILL take you as my own people, and I will be your God.”

So, the Jewish people used the four cups of Passover to correspond with those four statements that God had made. The first cup they called the **CUP OF SANCTIFICATION**. This is that they were set apart by God. Second cup, the **CUP OF THE PLAGUES**, which is to remind them of the judgment that set them free from slavery. The third cup is called the **CUP OF REDEMPTION** and the fourth cup, the **CUP OF INGATHERING**.

So, think about these as they apply to Jesus, what Jesus was doing was fulfilling each cup. The cup of sanctification represents God gathering His followers together. So, Jesus has gathered with the 12. The cup of plagues we see clearly in the Garden of Gethsemane. Remember how Jesus cried out in anguish, “Father, if you're willing, take this *CUP* from Me, yet not My will but Yours be done.” What's He talking about? He's talking about drinking the cup of judgment, your judgment, and my judgment. The third cup is called the cup of redemption. This is what Jesus accomplished on the cross when He paid the price for our sins. **AND** it was during the meal that Jesus lifted up this third cup, the cup of redemption, and said to His disciples, this cup is the New Testament or the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

So, in every aspect, the origin of communion has its roots in the ancient observance of the Passover. It's the continuation of the redemption story God has been writing throughout human history. **BUT there is even more cultural significance to this meal.**

In the ancient Middle East, there were three ways to repair a ruptured relationship. One is called the salt covenant. Salt was a very precious commodity, without modern day refrigeration, salt is one of the only natural preservatives there are. So, it was valuable. In fact, our word salary comes from the word salt. So, one way was financial in nature.

A second way you repaired a ruptured relationship is through the threshold covenant. This might remind you of your wedding day. But when two neighbors were at odds and wanted to resolve their differences, they might publicly celebrate their reconciliation by carrying one another over each other's thresholds.

But the most common way of repairing a ruptured relationship is called the meal covenant. This is the most common way of doing it. Think about when Peter denied Jesus three times the night of His arrest. Peter quit when the going got tough, stood back when he should have stood up. But when Jesus sees Him again

after the resurrection, what does Jesus do? He prepares a meal. This is Jesus' way of saying our relationship may have been fractured, but I receive you back!

Today we're gonna be participating in something that's been observed by believers all around the world ever since the day Jesus instituted it more than 2000 years ago *and* this meal is a reconciliation meal! No matter who you are or what you've done, you're invited to this table because Jesus' shed blood and broken body are the way back! Come on praise God today if you are glad that all are welcome at His table and that He has made a way for us to come back to Him! This is a meal that can bring us into the presence of God, can help us deal with our brokenness, can restore fellowship with God and one another and bring honor to Jesus Christ!

I love the way John Calvin described what happens in communion. He said it simply:

His life [that is Jesus life] **passes over into ours.**

AND here is the best part about this. It's awesome when we can enjoy it in the context of a weekend worship service like today. But it's not an essential part of every worship service. The New Testament simply doesn't treat it that way. AND the New Testament never prescribes a frequency. It simply says, "Whenever you do it, do it in remembrance of Jesus." BUT when you consider the fact that communion itself grew out of the Passover feast, which was a family meal, the ideal place to have communion is among your friends and family!

SO, today I want to empower you, even though we're going to participate in communion together, that this is not something that's pastor or priest centered, but Jesus centered! I'd love for you to periodically, in your home, or with some of your friends from church, to celebrate this and all its meaning together outside of the four walls of the church building! We will always do it periodically as a church family, but for those of you who crave more frequency, I wanna set you free to do this on your own! And to do in a context more like the original Passover meal, which is a meal shared with friends.

Alright, here's something else I put in my notes before we wrap this up. I wrote, **before the ink was dry on the new covenant there was betrayal.** At practically every juncture in human history, whenever God entered into a covenant with His people, almost immediately after that covenant was ratified, there was a betrayal of that covenant on the part of the people. In other words, before the ink was even dry on the promises of God, we turn around and betray Him.

For example, God made a promise to Noah to never again destroy the world with a flood. And how does Noah repay him? By getting lights out drunk and passing out naked. God made a covenant with Abraham to bless him, make him into a great people, give them a land of their own. And then at the first sign of difficulty, Abraham deserts the land and lies about his wife, Sarah. When God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai after delivering them from slavery in Egypt, before Moses could return from the top of the mountain, Israel was cavorting like pagans around a golden idol. When David was promised that there would always be one of his descendants on the throne in God's kingdom he repaid God by committing adultery and murdering the woman's husband. You get the picture.

Well, the Gospel of Mark lays out this same betrayal scenario by using something that's called Chiastic {Key-ass-tick} Structure. It's a very distinctive Jewish way of writing. As Westerners, when we write a story, we tend to build toward a main point which typically lies at the end of the story. Jewish people didn't write like that. Instead, they would often sandwich their main point, not at the end, but at the center of a story. So, in Mark's account of the Lord's supper, it's sandwiched between two accounts of betrayal by his inner most circle of friends. Before the supper, Judas betrayal, and immediately after, Peter's betrayal.

Mark's point is that even though God is making this new covenant with His people, it's still marked by infidelity on our part. Every time God does something special for us, we answer it with unfaithfulness. **BUT** why does Mark emphasize that the very first communion happened in the midst of betrayal? Here's why! Because God is reminding us that we're not in a relationship with Him because we deserve it!

At the first communion, the one that's our pattern, on that night communion was attended by a traitor and a bunch of cowards! Men who would either turn Jesus in for the money or who would run from Him to save their own skin! The first communion, what some consider the holiest and purest moment in the life of the church, it began and ended with betrayal.

Church hear me saying this, communion is for the undeserving! All are welcome at the Table! At Jesus feast no one gets in because they're worthy! AND no one has the right to turn others away because this is Christ's meal! And as host, He sets the rules, and He made clear at the very first one that the undeserving are the ones it's intended for! Amen?

I love this call to worship from a 1960's worship manual, it says:

“Come to this sacred table, not because you must, but because you may; come to testify not that you are righteous but that you sincerely love our Lord Jesus Christ and desire to be His true disciples. Come, not because you're strong, but because you're weak; not because you have any claim on heaven's rewards, but because in your frailty and sin you stand in constant need of heaven's mercy. Come because you love the Lord a little and want to love Him more; come because He loved you and gave Himself for you; lift up your hearts, above your cares and fears; let this bread and wine be a sign of God's grace to you and a pledge of your love to the Lord Christ.”

That's Jesus' invitation to you. Whether you are here in the house or still watching online, come to this sacred table today. Not because you're worthy, not because you have your life together, not because you're sinless and spotless in your heart, but because you need what Jesus has to offer! You need His grace! You need more of His presence. You need His covering for your sins! God has invited the unfaithful of heart, the ones who betray, to a place of love and acceptance! Where I'm loved just as I am!

This has always been the cry of the human heart. God, will you take me back? We know we've messed up. We know that even after we've been following Jesus for years we're still capable of doing things that cause us humiliation and shame. God's answer to the human heart is a meal where He says, “Come as you are, come and gather around my table. Be reconciled to me. This meal is what heals ruptured relationships.”

SO, before we partake a few quick notes. First, this is *not a passive cerebral event*, but an active participation experience. What I mean is for most 21st century believers we've lost the significance of these words: (1 Corinthians 11:25)

Do this in remembrance of me...

We hear “remember” and we think, “Well, I'm supposed to mentally recall the facts of the crucifixion.” So, communion becomes a head trip, a passive and largely cerebral event, something that takes place only in my mind. When we reduce communion to that, we run the risk of what's talked about in 1 Corinthians 11: (v.26)

You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must never let familiarity breed contempt.

In other words, don't let it become too familiar, too mechanical, where it loses its significance.

To the first century Christians the act of remembrance was more than just recalling something, it was active participation. It meant to experience the event in a new way through ritual repetition. So, communion is not primarily a time for thinking about the historical ministry of Jesus. It's a time to connect and commune with Christ inside our hearts.

AND when we do it that way communion becomes a fresh touch from God. It's all about Jesus entering my present reality, our broken hearts, our grief, our pain, our happiness, our plans, you're inviting Jesus to come join you right here. It's my invitation for Jesus to enter my present moment and be for me what I need.

Something else. *We're not attending a funeral*, it's a victory supper! Too often our thinking is outta balance when it comes to communion. We get stuck in the mentality of perpetual Good Friday. For many communion has become a funeral for poor Jesus rather than the celebration it actually is.

BUT think about this. The origin of the Lord's Supper has its roots in the Jewish Passover celebration. Jesus took the elements of that Passover meal and redefine them, that's what we have been discovering today. So, listen to how Passover is described in the Old Testament. (Exodus 12:14)

"You are always to remember this day and celebrate it with a feast to the Lord. Your descendants are to honor the Lord with this feast from now on."

If you walked out of slavery after 400 years like the Jewish people did, your father was a slave and his father was a slave, and so was your great-grandfather and your great-great-grandfather, as far back as you can remember, you've been slaves. Then God gives you a meal to commemorate the event that finally set you free, you can bet that meal is gonna be a celebration!

So, let me ask you, what should a meal look like, like communion, that celebrates the greatest freedom ever given to humankind? Should it be a funeral or a celebration? Communion is meant to restore our perspective on life, to remind us that God has already dealt with the worst that this life has to offer, and He's been victorious! It's to remind us that there's nothing in your life so great that God is not greater!

One last thing to keep in mind before we eat and drink in remembrance. We also *send our roots deeper into Christ*. Jesus said: (John 6:56)

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

Notice what Jesus said, in doing this we remain in Christ and He remains in us.

You might recognize the name Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a brilliant young pastor, a seminary teacher who openly opposed Adolf Hitler's policies. So, on April 5th, 1943, the Germans arrested Bonhoeffer and put him in prison. Two years later, the Nazis executed him, hanging him on the gallows just before the allies swept in to liberate Germany. About 10 weeks after his arrest, Bonhoeffer ended a letter to his parents with these simple words:

"It is Monday, and I was just sitting down to a dinner of turnips and potatoes when a parcel you sent arrived. Such things give me greater joy than I can say. Although I'm

utterly convinced that nothing can break the bonds between us, I seem to need some outward token or sign to reassure me. I suppose it's rather like the felt need in our religion for the sacraments.”

Do you get what he's saying? Bonhoeffer saying that even though he knew his mom and dad loved him, he needed to be periodically reminded of their love in tangible ways. Then Bonhoeffer drew this parallel between the Lord's Supper and his parents' gift. The Lord's Supper is like a package from home. It's a tangible expression of God's love for us, a physical reality that God has not forgotten us, that He is with us, that He loves us.

So, communion is about connection, to experience Jesus in a fresh way.

SO, what do you need for Jesus to do for you today? Where are you struggling? What are you afraid of? Where are you feeling all alone? Where do you feel shame and guilt? As you partake in communion, I want you to visualize Jesus confronting your fear or guilt and hear Him speaking words of hope. If you're feeling lonely right now, visualize Jesus walking into that empty place and joining you there. Whatever you're facing or feeling, see Jesus entering into that experience alongside you because this is what happens in communion.

We become one with Him and He becomes one with us. Let's pray and then we will celebrate together!