

The Lord's Supper: A Visible Sermon
Luke 22:7-23

We are in Luke 22 this morning, continuing in our series through Luke's gospel. We are coming down to the final few chapters which means we are in the midst of Jesus' final few hours with his disciples before he is arrested, tried, and crucified. But before Jesus goes to the cross, he is going to spend one more important and special evening with his closest followers. And in their time together, Jesus is going to take one of the most important celebrations for the nation of Israel and use it to preach the gospel, establishing a new practice for all churches to observe since that evening.

This morning we are going to talk about the Lord's Supper, or communion. And as we will see this an important part of the Christian life in the context of the Christian community. And it's important for every church to teach on because like baptism, the various denominations that exist hold to very different views about the Lord's Supper. There are different practices and understandings of its meaning.

When I was really young, about 6 years old, I can remember going to a Catholic Mass with a friend. It was the first time I had ever gone to something like that. I don't remember much but I do remember everyone going to the front, kneeling, eating the bread and the drinking the cup. I had no idea what was going on but I went up front just because everyone else was. After that, I fell asleep during the priest's talk. That is all I remember.

Other than that experience, I grew up in Baptist churches so the practice was obviously much different. Every so often we would have a special service. The deacons would carry these golden, round trays that had the tiny little cups of grape juice and the little crackers. Each row would then pass the trays to each other and every time as a kid I was scared to death I would drop the juice tray. You don't want to be the kid who spilled the blood of Jesus.

So those were two very different experiences, and not only in the way it was observed *practically* but also in the way it was viewed *theologically*. One, saw the bread and juice as literally the body and blood of Jesus being re-sacrificed on the altar. The other saw

it as symbolic, not really the body and blood Jesus, but something that was to be observed as a memorial.

So all the to say, depending on your past church experiences you may have a certain idea about the Lord's Supper but, like with all things, we want to make sure our understanding and practices are biblical. And our passage this morning will help us do just that...

Luke 22:7-13

7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. **8** So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." **9** They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?" **10** He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters **11** and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' **12** And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there." **13** And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

So, the historical and cultural context of this passage is that of the Passover. And this is very important to understand if we are to fully understand and appreciate the Lord's Supper.

Passover is one of seven annual feasts established by God for his people to observe. There is the Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of First fruits, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. You can read about these in Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16.

Each of these feasts were established by the Lord to commemorate various things, but they were given to the people in order to remember his mercy and faithfulness to them. So each of them invoked various emotions, sometimes mourning for sin, sometimes joy for God's goodness to them.

But each one centered around food. The table was an important place for God's people. It was the place that they gathered together to draw close to the Lord and confess sin and rejoice in his forgiveness. And this was not an individual exercise, but a corporate experience.

We can hear the importance of the table from David's most famous psalm, Psalm 23...

Psalm 23

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. **6** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Here we read that David is in the presence of enemies, but he is not overwhelmed or terrified. He is comforted by his shepherd who has set a table for him. There is a feast for him to enjoy to remember God's faithfulness to him.

So feasts and festivals were incredibly important to the people of Israel, the Passover being the most significant. And it was the most significant because it commemorated the most significant event in Israel's history - the exodus.

If you don't remember this part of their history, the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt for 400 years. Eventually God sends Moses and Aaron to confront Pharaoh to let his people go, but Pharaoh didn't want that to happen so God sent 10 plagues to show His power and judgment on Pharaoh and Egypt. He sent plagues such as frogs and locusts. He turned the Nile river into blood.¹ But it was the final plague which was most severe. The final plague was the death of all the firstborn sons in the land.

But before the night of the 10th plague, God gave specific instruction to Israel. Each household was to kill a lamb, and then spread the blood of the lamb around the door of each home.

But not only were they to kill the lamb, they were to eat it as well. And there were very specific instructions on how.² It was to be cooked a certain way, they were to destroy whatever was left over the next morning (there were no to-go boxes for this meal), and they were to eat with their belts fastened, sandals on, and staff in hand, to emphasize that they were about to be on the move.

Sure enough, God brought judgment on Egypt just like he said he would but when He saw the blood on and around the door He "passed over" their homes. They escaped judgment because of the sacrifice of the lamb. From there God took the people out of Egypt, out of slavery, made them His own people, and eventually took them to the Promised Land.

To remember this incredible event in their history, they celebrated it each year in the form of the Passover. The Passover became a huge celebration for the people of Israel. Each year they would remember God's rescuing of them from slavery and would sacrifice lambs and have a meal together in honor of the event.

¹ See Ex. 7 and on.

² See Ex. 12:7-11.

So the Passover meal is the context of this passage in the final hours of Jesus' earthly life. He sends Peter and John ahead to make preparations for the meal where a lamb would die and they would enjoy the meal together to remember God's faithful, gracious rescuing work.

Luke 22:14-16

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."

Notice again that last phrase "until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" - this tells us that the Passover pointed to something else. In other words, it was not merely a celebration of what has happened, but points to something that will happen. It was only a shadow of something that was to come. There was something that it pointed to that was waiting to be "fulfilled." The disciples who prepared the meal and gathered with Jesus in the upper room knew that it was an important meal, but they had no idea what it truly would mean...

And we see what that is in the next verses...

Luke 22:17-23

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.

So Jesus and His disciples are all at the table ready to eat the Passover meal, to celebrate what God did for the nation of Israel in protecting them and setting them free from slavery. Then, Jesus does something incredible. He takes the bread and the wine and enhances the meaning of the entire celebration: **No longer is this about God saving Israel from slavery in Egypt through the shed blood of the sacrificial lambs. Now it is about what God is doing through the body and shed blood of His only Son for His people.**

Understand what this means, because it is huge! Through this act at the Passover meal, Jesus is saying that He is the true and better sacrificial lamb that will save His people from God's judgment. He is saying that the first Passover we see in Exodus is

actually pointing to Himself, the true lamb that was sacrificed to provide His people a true and better exodus from the slavery of sin and death.

Paul points this out to his first letter to the Corinthian church as the reason why we can and should walk away from sinfulness.

1 Cor. 5:7

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Jesus says this is to fulfill the “new covenant.” He is referring to a covenant or promise God made to His people in which He would forgive all of their sins and take them to be His people. The death and resurrection of Jesus is to keep this promise. He is saying you will be a part of God’s people and will find complete and total forgiveness of sins through my blood, which this meal symbolizes.

He then says “Do this in remembrance of me.” Here is the command to the disciples and to us. **Jesus gives the disciples and the Church today a physical reminder of His death and what it accomplished.**

This is so important for us, because we are a very forgetful people. How easy is it for us to forget who God is, who we are, and what God has done for us in Jesus? How easy is it for us to sing God’s praises on Sunday only to forget his goodness on Monday? God knows our forgetfulness and in his patient understanding of our feeble hearts and minds, he helps us remember. God established all of those feasts for Israel because they were prone to forget, and he established this feast because we are prone to forget too.

Observing the Lord’s Supper is a reminder of the Gospel. It tells the story of our redemption and the great length that God went through to provide it for us. When we eat the bread we are reminded of His body that endured beatings, torture, and ultimately crucifixion, because of our sin. When we drink the juice we are reminded that only by the shedding of blood is their forgiveness of sins and Jesus’ blood accomplishes just that for us.

Not only though is this a reminder of Jesus’ sacrificial death, it is **also a reminder that Christ will come again.** Listen to what Paul says to the church at Corinth regarding the Lord’s Supper...

1 Corinthians 11:26

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

When we observe the Lord's Supper we are reminded of the death of Christ but His death was a victorious death. He will reign on earth when He returns to make all things new. So when we do this it should not only humble us at the thought of Jesus' death for us but it should also encourage us. There is an eternal, glorious future for God's people.

Just like how God rescued Israel from Egypt, protected them, provided for them, and ultimately delivered them to a new land for their enjoyment, Christians have this promise for the future. God has not only rescued us from this life but we have been promised life in a future place where we will enjoy God forever. And this promise was sealed by the blood of Jesus.

Due to various religious and church backgrounds there are a few things that we need to clarify about observing the Lord's Supper.

1. Who is it for? Who should take part in communion?

Because it symbolizes our taking part in the death of Jesus it is only for those who have trusted in Christ as their Savior. For those who are born again through their faith in Jesus.

And, further, Scripture teaches it should be a corporate experience as much as possible. The Lord's Supper is a family meal. So we would not encourage observing the Lord's Supper as a family or individually as a private experience.

Paul gives important instruction on this in 1 Corinthians. Notice how he describes it...

1 Cor. 10:16-17

16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? **17** Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

In other words, the Lord's Supper is an occasion to where the many become one.

Later Paul would say in 1 Cor. 11...

1 Cor. 11:33

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another

Why does he say to "wait for one another?" Because that is the proper place for observing the Lord's Supper.

For example, have you ever while we are singing accidentally start singing the next verse before you are supposed to, but you are just so confident that you sing out but you end up being the only one who sang anything? I've been here long enough to know that's happened for some of you. It's certainly happened to me. Why does that feel weird? Because you sing out of place with the rest of the body.

We might view observing the Lord's Supper away from the corporate gathering the same way. It is out of place. We celebrate it in corporate worship.

2. How often should a church observe it?

We are not told in Scripture. Paul says "whenever" or "as often as you do it" in 1 Cor. 11... Some churches observe it every week. Some every quarter. Our common practice is to observe it the first Sunday of each month. But that is not a law or binding principle.

3. Another important question to ask is, what happens when we celebrate the Lord's Supper?

I mean, is there like some spiritual or magical thing that happens when we observe communion.

Just like baptism, it is a physical reminder of Christ's sacrifice. There is nothing magical or mystical about it. And that is very different from the views of some other expressions of communion, the Eucharist in the Catholic Church, for example.

They teach what is called "transubstantiation" where the bread and wine literally transform into the body and blood of Jesus. But we would not hold that position. Scripture is clear that it is not a re-sacrifice of Jesus on the altar for the sins we have recently committed. The author of Hebrews speaks directly against this idea.

Hebrews 10:11-14

11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **12** But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, **13** waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. **14** For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

If we are not careful, as we see from other denominations, we might be tempted to take ordinances, good practices, and turn them into a ritual necessary for our salvation. But the Lord's Supper, and baptism, is not a ritual where we do something for Jesus. Just the opposite, they were instituted as a reminder of what Jesus did for us and what our salvation means. In baptism, we are reminded of our union with Christ, that we died

and were raised to new life with Jesus. In the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of the sacrifice he made for people who do not merit salvation but desperately need it.

Now, to say nothing mystical happens doesn't mean it has no spiritual benefit for us. We are certainly edified by the Lord's Supper. We are reminded of incredible truths that encourage us, humble us, and renew us.

In fact, in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul is addressing a church with a lot of problems in it. And in chapter 11, Paul speaks of their divisions³ and pride⁴ and the way Paul addresses that is by talking about the Lord's Supper of all things. And the reason he does that is because when we observe the Lord's Supper we are making some declarations about ourselves. We are declaring that we are of one body and that every one of us are sinners and that Jesus is our only hope.

So it is a moment when we examine ourselves as Paul tells them to do in 1 Cor. 11, for any unchecked pride or bitterness or unforgiveness.

The Lord's Supper has been likened to a wide net that is cast to catch pride or bitterness that might be in our hearts. Or it is like an air filter in your heating system or car, there to catch pollutants and filth that are present. There is a lot of wear and tear in the life of the church community and the Lord's Supper is regular maintenance on our hearts to preserve unity and harmony within the body.

So, all of that to say, we don't hold it as a mystical experience as other churches or denominations might, but that doesn't mean it doesn't affect us in real ways.

A VISIBLE SERMON

One of my favorite descriptions of the Lord's Supper is that it is a "visible sermon." It is something tangible that we touch, taste, and see that preaches the gospel to us.

And every good, gospel-centered sermon does two main things: it confronts and it comforts. In other words, a gospel-centered sermon will point a congregation to their need for salvation but will then lift up Christ as the Savior they need.

And that is exactly what the Lord's Supper preaches to us. It reminds us of the seriousness of our sin. Sin is so serious that it separates us from God who is holy and the only way to find forgiveness and reconciliation is by the shedding of blood. So, it confronts us about the seriousness of our sin. So we don't treat it lightly. We don't rush through it. It is meant to confront us.

³ 1 Cor. 11:18

⁴ 1 Cor. 11:22

Particularly this morning, if you have not seen the seriousness of your sin and your need for forgiveness, though the Lord's Supper is not something you probably observe, let our observation of it speak to you of the seriousness of sin. God is holy. We are not. And, again, our sin, your sin has broken the relationship you could have with the holy God. The cup and the bread confronts you today too that reality.

But it is also meant to comfort us, because it reminds us that even though our sin is so serious that blood must be shed, *blood has been shed* for our sin. And it is not our blood. It was the blood of Jesus.

Thinking back to the exodus event in Egypt, we can only imagine what it would have been like as an Israelite the night of the Passover. Taking every precaution to follow the law of God perfectly in the sacrifice of the Lamb, how to prepare it and eat it. Maybe, at least in the back of your mind, wondering if God really would pass over your house. Clutching and hugging your firstborn with nervous anticipation that maybe God's judgment would fall on your house.

And perhaps you come to the Lord's Supper with similar trepidation. You recognize your unworthiness, your sin, your failure to live in a way that perfectly honors and glorifies the Lord. So maybe observing the Lord's Supper for you feels more like grief than joy, even though you've trusted in the finished work of Christ.

If that is you, can I remind you that we do not live under the law as Israel did, but under grace. And the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper were given as reminders of Christ's perfect work on your behalf.

In fact, I love what Charles Spurgeon said about this to comfort his people in his church. He said:

“In keeping these commandments there is great reward; but they are not presented to us as matters of servitude. In baptism we are made to see the burial of our Lord, and are helped to enter into spiritual fellowship with him therein: this is no burdensome ordinance, but a delight. The Lord's own Supper is a joyful festival, a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. All is joy and rest about these two ordinances. In enjoying them we feel that we are not under law, but under grace. I would not have you come to this table with the same trembling with which an Israelite ate the passover, or stand there as the Israelite did, with your loins girt, and your staff in your hand, eating in haste and apprehension. Nay, but you may sit at ease, or even recline, to express the rest which you enjoy at the Lord's table, and the close communion to which your Redeemer invites you. He has called you his

friends, and he has honored you to be his table companions, to sit and feast with him without reserve.”⁵

We are told by Paul to examine ourselves before observing the Lord’s Supper, and that is right, but after a time of reflection and confession, you can enjoy the the elements with ease and gladdened hearts. The true Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for you and me.

CONCLUSION

Even though this sermon has come to its end, let me invite all who have turned from their sin and trusted in Christ to see, taste, and reflect on the sermon that continues when you partake of the elements. Jesus is your Passover Lamb, sacrificed in your place, and now because of your faith in his finished work you stand justified before God. His judgment has passed over you never to return.

After I pray, if you have trusted in Christ you are welcome to partake of the elements anytime during the next two songs.

VERSES

Luke 22:7-13

Psalm 23:5-6

Luke 22:14-16

Luke 22:17-23

1 Cor. 5:7

1 Cor. 11:26

1 Cor. 10:16-17

1 Cor. 11:33

Heb. 10:11-14

⁵ CH. Spurgeon, “To Those Who Feel Unfit for the Communion”
<https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/to-those-who-feel-unfit-for-the-communion/#flipbook/>.

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

What experiences have you had with the Lord's Supper/Communion?

How have they shaped what you believe about it?

Was there something in the sermon that clarified a question you had about the Lord's Supper?

In what ways is the Lord's Supper a "visible sermon?"