

**Communion Series:** *Together at the Table* (2023)

The Lord's Table | **1 Cor 10:21** (*Luke 22:7–20 & Exodus 25:23–30*)

North Center | Feb 6, 2023

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**Sermon Series:** *together at the table*

**Introduction:** *different aspects of this ordinance*

- |                             |                      |                           |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| • Communion (participation) | <b>1 Cor 10:16</b>   | The Communal Aspect       |
| • The Lord's Table          | <b>1 Cor 10:21</b>   | The Furniture             |
| • The Lord's Supper         | <b>1 Cor 11:20</b>   | The Meal                  |
| • Remembrance               | <b>1 Cor 11:24</b>   | The Mental Activity       |
| • Proclamation              | <b>1 Cor 11:26</b>   | The Evangelistic Message  |
| • The Bread and the Cup     | <b>Luke 22:19–20</b> | The Substance of the Meal |
| • Eucharist (giving thanks) | <b>Luke 22:19</b>    | The Heart Response        |
| • Sign of the Covenant      | <b>Luke 22:20</b>    | The Promise of the Meal   |
| • Breaking Bread            | <b>Luke 24:35</b>    | The Graphic Reenactment   |
| • Love Feast                | <b>Jude 1:12</b>     | The Atmosphere            |

Over the course of this year (2023), on the first Sunday of each month, I am planning on preaching a **biblical theology of each of these aspects** to help us see how significant this moment is in the life of the church and to help us see that the whole Bible is pointing toward this meal & this meal is pointing toward the entire Bible.

We are going to start by looking at the furniture (i.e., the “*furnished upper room*”, **Luke 22:12**).

**Q.** What is the furniture of this meal? **A.** the *table*.

Many churches refer to this ordinance (this symbolic thing we do) as **the Lord's Table**.

**Q.** Where do we get this language?

**A.** One of the clearest places we see this language used is in **1 Corinthians 10:21**.

You may recall that **1 Corinthians** is an epistle (a letter) that the apostle Paul wrote to a church that was working through all kinds of problems (*theological, sexual, ecclesiastical, familial, ethical...*), and one of their problems was how they were practicing this meal. For starters, there were some (apparently) who thought that they were free to participate in the **idolatrous** worship practices of their culture and then turn around and join the church in its worship of **Almighty God**. And Paul says, “*It doesn't work that way.*” He points to this ordinance and says,

**You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons;  
You cannot partake<sup>1</sup> of the Lord's table<sup>2</sup> and of the table of demons.**

~ **1 Corinthians 10:21**

What's Paul saying here?

What's so significant about the **table**, and how do we **partake** of it?

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<sup>1</sup> μετέχειν

<sup>2</sup> τραπέζης κυρίου (the table of the Lord, ESV)

## Miniature *Biblical Theology* of the Table<sup>3</sup>

### THREE TABLES <sup>4</sup>

1. The *First* Table
2. The *Last* Table
3. The *Lord's* Table

#### 1. The **First Table** | Exodus 25:23–30<sup>5</sup>

The first time we read about a “table” in the Bible is in **Exodus 25:23**.<sup>6</sup>

- God has rescued His people from their slavery in Egypt (**Exod 1–14**)
- He led them to a mountain where He gave them His laws & His promises (**15–24**)
- Then He gives them instructions for building a place where He can dwell among them (**25**).

And let them make Me a sanctuary **that** I may dwell among them.

According to all that I show you,  
that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings,<sup>7</sup>  
just so you shall make it.

~ *Exodus 25:8–9*

The first piece of furniture that God instructs them to build is a box (the ark of the testimony<sup>8</sup>) where they could store important things that God wanted them to keep (*the stone tablets containing God's covenant with His people, a golden jar with manna from the wilderness, Aaron's staff...*<sup>9</sup>). This box was made from acacia wood<sup>10</sup> and covered with pure gold (**Exod 25:10–11**). And on top of the box, they were told to build a seat – called the “*mercy seat*” (**25:17, 21**). And from this mercy seat, God would meet with His people (**25:22**).

If the first piece of furniture is a seat, what do you suppose the second piece of furniture is? A table. We read the instructions for this table in **Exodus 25:23–30**. The first thing we notice is that it is made of acacia wood (**23**) and that it is covered with pure gold (**24**). In other words, the table is identical in structure to the seat. They're a set! They match. They look like they belong together. And the last thing we see is what this table is for: it's for a meal in the presence of the God (**30**).

And you shall set the showbread on the table *before Me* always.<sup>11</sup>

~ *Exodus 25:30*

<sup>3</sup> τράπεζα: a structure or surface on which food or other things can be placed (BDAG).

<sup>4</sup> There are many more examples that could be explored in a thorough biblical theology of *the table*: e.g., the table in the palace (**2 Samuel 9:7–13**); the table in enemy territory (**Psalms 23:5**); the table with sinners (**Matthew 9:10**); the table in Christ's kingdom (**Luke 22:30**); the Lord's table (**1 Cor 10:21**).

<sup>5</sup> See also Exodus 37:10–16.

<sup>6</sup> This is certainly not the first table in human history, but it is the first time the word is used & its construction is described in the Bible. That makes it a significant starting point for a biblical theology of the table.

<sup>7</sup> Just as the tabernacle has “*all its furnishings*” (**Exod 25:9**), so there is a “*furnished upper room*” (**Luke 22:12**).

<sup>8</sup> Also called the ark of the covenant.

<sup>9</sup> See Hebrews 9:4.

<sup>10</sup> Acacia (pronounced uh-kay-shaw) was strong, durable, water resistant, and naturally antibacterial.

<sup>11</sup> לפני (literally, “before My face”).

In **Leviticus 24**, we read that they were to bake 12 small loaves of bread (called the showbread), and they would arrange them on table as an offering to the Lord (**24:5–7**). But now the question is: **who eats the bread?** Answer: the priests (**24:9**).

So, let's put all this together. What do we have?

1. A seat and a table that match. They go together.
2. The seat is specifically called the “*mercy seat*”.<sup>12</sup>
3. God would meet with His people from this seat of mercy.
4. The table is meant to hold bread *in the presence of God*.
5. And the priests are the ones who are called to eat the bread.

There is so much that we can glean from this imagery (*especially when we consider the fact that every single Christian is called a priest because we all have access into the presence of God through the blood of the Lamb...*<sup>13</sup>); but I simply want us to see that **the first time** a TABLE is mentioned in the Bible, its PURPOSE was for **fellowship** between a sinful people and a holy God. This table was built SO THAT God's people might share a regular meal in His presence.

This **premier table** was a symbol of **relationship (togetherness)**: relational togetherness with Almighty God who meets with His people from a seat of mercy.<sup>14</sup> The table **meant** relationship.

In the **19<sup>th</sup> Century**, two cultural phenomena spread across the United States (and then eventually across the world) which radically changed our table experience:

- The invention of the **television** in the 1920s.<sup>15</sup>
- The invention of **fast-food restaurants** – also in the 1920s.<sup>16</sup>

I remember, as a young pastor, going on one of my first pastoral visits to an elderly couple's home. As I walked into their dining room, I noticed that their table was covered with stuff. There was no landscape on this table whatsoever. And then I saw their living room. The focal point of their living room was a television. And then they each had their own sofa chair. And next to their sofa chairs were two **TV Tray Tables**. Do you know what a *TV Tray Table* is? It's a small, personal-sized table that allows you to eat your individual meal without ever taking your eyes off the television.

As I looked at their table (covered in stuff) and then at their Television Trays, I realized the bargain that this couple had made – both with each other and with God: *they had traded relationship for entertainment*.

<sup>12</sup> It is significant that this seat is not called the “judgment seat”.

<sup>13</sup> See **1 Peter 2:9** & **Revelation 5:10**. Through the sacrificial death of the perfect Lamb, the veil was ripped in two (**Matt 27:51**), and so now every single believer has priestly access into the presence of God (**Heb 4:16**).

<sup>14</sup> We see the opposite in **Isa 65:11**, “*But you are those who forsake the Lord, who forget My holy mountain, who prepare a table for Gad, and who furnish a drink offering for Meni.*” These people are pursuing a relationship with Gad instead of God. The last time we hear of a table in the Old Testament is in the prophecy of Malachi. The prophet Malachi speaks of God's anger against the people because they viewed this Godward relationship with contempt as they said, “*The table of the Lord is contemptible*” (**Mal 1:7**).

<sup>15</sup> The **television** became commonplace in homes, businesses, and institutions in the 1950s.

<sup>16</sup> Supposedly, White Castle was the first **fast-food restaurant** on the scene in 1921.

That's one table-trading phenomenon. The other is **fast-food**.

My son Aukeem and I went out to eat at a local fast-food restaurant recently, and as we entered there was a sign telling us that we had a maximum of 30 minutes to eat our food together before we needed to leave! In other words, "**Don't linger**". Why? Because the fast-food industry is not focused on relational experience, but on expediency.

There's a missing element in our TV tray, fast-food (drive thru) culture: a **table** – with **seats** – where we **linger** – in the **presence** of others.

When we come to the table, it's not just a pragmatic, practical piece of furniture. It's telling us something about the kind of relationship that God is calling us into. When we come to the table, we are coming into the presence of a God who doesn't just want to provide for us, but who wants to **BE** with us.

God *provided food* in the wilderness

- as a way of showing His people that He was going to take care of them.

And God *provided a table* in the wilderness

- as a way of showing His people that He was going to have a relationship with them.

This isn't just the Lord's *Supper*; it's also the Lord's **Table** – and that is telling us something about what this moment is for:

- It's for our *relationship* with our merciful God – through Christ.
- It's for receiving His provisions in *the company of one another*.
- It's for *lingering* in His *presence* together.

Early on in our marriage, Liz and I decided that we wanted our children to grow up in a home where a table is the centerpiece.<sup>17</sup> We live in a culture that is so busy and so distracted and so entertained – that we are trying to create a place where we linger together. And, by God's design, the furniture that best represents this relational togetherness is the table.

## 2. The Last Table

The last time we read of a table in the Bible is in the book of Hebrews.

As you know, we just started a sermon series through the book of Hebrews, and we learned last week that the overarching theme of this book is "**Jesus is Better**". As we go through the book of Hebrews, we will continue to see the author pointing to things that were prominent in the Old Testament and saying, "*Jesus is better than that*".<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Our table is the most expensive item in our home (by far), and it is in the most prominent place in our home. You won't find a television anywhere in our living room, dining room, or kitchen – and that is very intentional.

<sup>18</sup> Jesus is better than the OT law, covenant, sacrifices, prophets, priests, promises, angels, etc.

In **chapter 9:1–2**, the author is pointing back to the tabernacle *and everything inside of it* – including the table, and then he says, “Jesus is better” (**Heb 9:11**).

But **Christ** came as High Priest of the good things to come,  
with **the greater and more perfect tabernacle**  
not made with hands,  
that is, not of this creation.  
~ *Hebrews 9:11*

What is he saying?

He’s saying that Jesus is greater and more perfect than the tabernacle *and everything in it*.<sup>19</sup>

- He is our **light**
  - ~ symbolized in the lampstand (2)
- He is our **source of life**
  - ~ symbolized in the bread & in the manna (4)<sup>20</sup>
- He is our access into the **presence of God**
  - ~ symbolized by the priest entering behind the veil (3)
- He is the **mercy** of God toward rebel sinners
  - ~ symbolized in the mercy seat (5)
  
- AND...He is the platform of our relationship with God
  - ~ symbolized in the table (2).<sup>21</sup>
  - As we fellowship with God the Father, we do it on Christ.

### 3. **The Lord’s Table**

All of this helps us to see what Paul means in **1 Corinthians** when he says that...

...you cannot partake of **the Lord’s table** and of the table of demons.  
~ *1 Corinthians 10:21*

The table is about fellowship. It’s about friendship. It’s about togetherness. It’s about welcoming others into your presence. It’s about relationship. And you cannot have a relationship with demons & with the Lord.

#### **CLOSE**

As the music team comes, we are going to respond to the message by singing “Come to the Table” – which is an invitation of coming (not first to this table), but to Jesus Christ. He gave up His life so that you might have a relationship with your Creator God. He alone holds your life. Our relationship with the Father takes place around Christ. Won’t you come?

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<sup>19</sup> His **covenant** is better than the stone tablets inside the ark (4). His **glory** is infinitely better than the cherubim (5). His **forgiveness** is better than anything a high priest could offer (6). His **blood** is better than the blood of the goats and calves (12)

<sup>20</sup> This was also symbolized in the green bud on Aaron’s rod (4).

<sup>21</sup> **Jesus is a better table.**