

Thanksgiving 2020

²² And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. (Mark 14:22-24 ESV)

The Lord's Supper
October 11th, 2020
Mark 14:12-25
Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning and happy Thanksgiving! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 14.

We're going to take a break from our series through 1 & 2 Thessalonians because today is an enormously important day. Today we are going to celebrate the Lord's Supper for the first time since March 2!

I'm thankful for a number of things today, but first and foremost on that list is this: I am thankful that I am going to celebrate the Lord's Supper with my brothers and sisters this morning! We need this. In Acts 2, we find a list of the top, non-negotiable things that every church should devote herself to. After Pentecost, when the church was in her earliest days, the disciples put their priorities in order. In verse 42, we read:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, **to the breaking of bread** and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 ESV)

Now, some debate whether or not this expression "the breaking of bread" is meant to refer to the celebration of communion specifically or just to Christian fellowship in general. The expression *is* used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to a normal, shared meal. But, in this instance, the context is king, and I would agree with commentator Richard Longnecker who notes:

Yet it is difficult to believe that Luke had in mind here only an ordinary meal, placing the expression, as he does, between two such religiously loaded terms as "the fellowship" and "prayer".¹

¹ Richard N. Longnecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (John-Acts)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 9, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 290.

The church did a number of things, but she DEVOTED herself to these. The church studied the Word, the church loved one another, the church observed the Lord's Table, and the church prayed.

From her earliest days, the church knew that this element – this commandment that was given to us by the Lord Jesus himself – was non-negotiable. For seven months, we have been missing out on this gift that God has blessed us with. Today, we're coming back to the table.

As is always our practice here, we are going to open God's Word to prepare our hearts to see in this communion what we are meant to see. To that end, would you look with me now to Mark 14:12-25. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³ And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵ And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." ¹⁶ And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

¹⁷ And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." ¹⁹ They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" ²⁰ He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. ²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

²² And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:12-25 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As I was preparing the sermon for this week, I found myself asking the question: Does the average Christian sitting in the congregation really feel the loss of the Lord's Table? I've heard countless Christians say, "I miss corporate singing!" I've heard, "I miss potlucks" and "I miss getting together for big social gatherings" and "I miss the gym nights." And, to be clear, I miss ALL of those things. Big time! I can't wait until we can do all of that again.

But it struck me: I don't think anyone has yet pulled me aside and said, "I miss the Lord's Table."

As Protestants in general, I think we can often be guilty of downplaying the sacred, glorious miracle that is communion. We reacted to the mystical Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation which taught that the bread literally becomes Jesus' physical flesh and that the cup literally becomes his physical blood and we said, "No, no, no! That's not right!"

Because it wasn't right. But, as is often the case, in our reaction I think many of us have swung the pendulum too far in the other direction. We say: "No, no, no! This is merely a SIGN. This is merely a MEMORIAL."

But, I would suggest this morning that any description of the Lord's Supper that includes the word "merely" is *merely* INADEQUATE. While the bread isn't Jesus' *literal, physical* body, and the cup isn't his *literal, physical* blood, the New Testament teaches us that, in this sacred ordinance, Jesus is REALLY PRESENT. The early church devoted themselves to the observance of the Lord's Table. They understood this meal that we are about to share in to be the very LIFEBLOOD of the church.

So, what did they see? What is the Lord's Table? That is the question we're going to ask this morning.

What Is The Lord's Table?

To answer that question, we are going back to the day when Jesus first instituted this ordinance. In our text this morning we learn that the Lord's Table is:

1. A celebration of deliverance

If we want to see in the Lord's Table what Jesus means for us to see, then we need to pay close attention to the details of this story. Mark highlights a very important detail for us in verse 12:

And on **the first day of Unleavened Bread**, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" (Mark 14:12 ESV)

The first Communion meal was shared during the Passover feast. This was not a coincidence. Jesus knew EXACTLY what he was doing. The disciples also knew exactly what he was doing because, as we read the

Gospels, we find that they ALL make a point of highlighting the fact that the Lord's Supper took place at the Passover feast.

They saw something monumental in this detail! So, what did they see? What was the significance of this Passover feast? And what does the Lord's Table have to do with it?

The Passover was a meal that the Jews celebrated every year to commemorate their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The meal was instituted so that later generations would not forget the mighty works that God had accomplished in delivering them from their enemies. In the liturgy of the meal, the children would ask: "Why is this night different than other nights?" and then the host of the meal would explain the Exodus story. They would then eat bitter herbs that reminded them of the bitter treatment they endured in Egypt and they would eat the Paschal or Passover lamb as a reminder of the lamb that was slain so that their firstborn children could live.

We're going to come back to that Passover lamb in our next point, but for now I want to make sure that we understand what the Passover represented to the Israelites. This was the freedom feast! This was the deliverance party! This was a time that was marked in every Jew's calendar when they would stop and remember the way that God powerfully and miraculously acted on their behalf so that they could be set free from bondage and slavery!

Why did Jesus take THAT celebration and turn it into a celebration of himself? He answers that question for us in John 5:39:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and **it is they that bear witness about me** (John 5:39 ESV)

"They speak of ME" Jesus said! "The Passover pointed back to the deliverance from Egypt, but both the Passover AND the deliverance from Egypt ultimately point forward to me!"

When God brought about deliverance from human bondage, it was AMAZING, but it was also just a foretaste of what was still to come. We need more than freedom from Egypt. We need to be set free from the tyranny of sin! We need spiritual freedom, and in Jesus, that's what we have! So, Jesus commandeered this feast and he said, "From now on, this feast is going to celebrate an even GREATER freedom!"

This is why one of the names for the Lord's Table is the Eucharist. Eucharist literally means "Thanksgiving!" The Thanksgiving feast that you typically enjoy with your extended family may have been postponed for this year, but FEAR NOT! You have been invited to the ULTIMATE THANKSGIVING FEAST and we are going to celebrate it in just a short while.

So, let's get practical: As you come to the Table today, Jesus means for you to see this as a CELEBRATION OF THE FREEDOM HE BOUGHT FOR YOU! You are FREE! Free from the evil one! Free from the bondage to sin and death! Free from condemnation! Free to inherit the promises of God through Christ! Come to the Table with a thankful heart today!

But the Lord's Table is more than that. It is also:

2. A reminder that we all deserve judgement

I mentioned that we would come back to the Passover lamb. If you remember, God delivered His people from Egypt by sending ten plagues. The final plague was the most devastating. For the tenth plague, God put to death every first-born son in Egypt. This was the plague that finally led Pharaoh to set God's people free.

The Israelites themselves were living in Egypt when the angel of death passed over. The Israelites were no more righteous than the Egyptians. They were just as worthy of judgement as their Egyptian captors.

And yet, God provided a way of escape.

He told them to kill a first-born lamb from their flock – a lamb that was unblemished and without defect – and to apply the blood of that lamb to the doorposts of their houses. If the angel of death saw the blood of the firstborn lamb on their doorposts, then he would "pass over" their houses. This is, of course, how the Passover got its name. It is a celebration of the night when the angel of death "passed over" God's people. It was the day when God's judgement "passed over" the Israelites. Therefore, the annual celebration of this event always included the sacrificing of the Passover lamb.

Mark wants to make sure that we don't miss the connection between THAT Passover lamb, and this scene with Jesus. He tells us that the first Communion was celebrated:

on the first day of Unleavened Bread, **when they sacrificed the Passover lamb** (Mark 14:12a ESV)

As the disciples gathered, the city of Jerusalem would have been filled with the bleating of lambs awaiting a bloody sacrifice. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus was probably exaggerating a bit when he wrote this, but he reported:

that at Passover in A.D. 66, the year the temple was completed, **255,600 lambs** were slaughtered in the temple.²

The Passover reminded the Israelites that freedom came at a cost. Now, it's worth noting that during a traditional Passover meal, the Jews would not have lamented the death of this lamb – after all, it was just a lamb. It was a small price to pay for freedom and life!

But, on this side of the cross, we understand who that lamb represented. We see now what they only saw in part. We too deserve judgement. We are sinners. I am a sinner. You are a sinner. The person sitting next to you is a sinner. And that's a horrifying thought because God says that:

the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23a ESV)

God HATES sin! The Bible is clear about that. Sin ruins everything and we have perpetuated it. We've helped to spread the rebellious virus that is literally killing the world. All of us are guilty. Romans 3 says:

²³ for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23 ESV)

We have all sinned. We all deserve judgement.

But God hasn't changed, and in the same way that He provided a way out for the Jews who saw the angel of death approaching their houses, so too has he provided us with a way of escape. Romans 3 goes on to say:

²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as **a propitiation by his blood**, to be received by faith. (Romans 3:23-25a ESV)

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 419.

Propitiation is a fancy word that means an offering that satisfies a debt. This is what we saw in that first Passover, isn't it? The first-born Passover lamb was killed to take the place of the first-born Israelite son and his blood was applied to the doorposts of the house. The lamb was put forward as a propitiation by his blood.

In the same way, JESUS is now our Passover lamb. If we have applied Jesus' blood to the doorposts of our hearts, then God's judgement will "pass over" us! He's not going to make us pay for the same sin twice. Jesus' death was enough. His blood was enough. We are going to live forever with God in the new heavens and the new earth because Jesus has settled our debt.

And so, THIS is now our Passover feast! And here, we remember the cost. Here, we remember that every one of us was deserved judgment. It should have been us on the cross.

And we need to remember that, don't we? We would be tempted to continue to play with the sin that Jesus died for. We would be tempted to return to those destructive, wicked habits that we used to entertain. So, God commanded us to come to this table and to come to it often. He commands us to break the bread, to drink the cup as a reminder the price for our redemption. In the same way that the Israelites heard the bleating of the Passover lamb that was slain, we look to Jesus and say with John the Baptist:

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29b ESV)

So, let's behold him this morning. See the price for our redemption. See the firstborn son who died so that we who were slaves to sin could be made children and heirs. In faith, apply his blood to your heart and remember that we all deserve judgement, but that God has provided a way for us to live! Amen?

Jesus also teaches us here that the Lord's table is:

3. A sign that God has done a new thing

When Jesus took the cup, his language shifted from Passover language to the language of covenant.

A covenant is a serious thing. In the Ancient Near East, it was not uncommon for small tribes that lacked the manpower to defend themselves to make a covenant agreement with larger nations. This agreement was

called a suzerain-vassal agreement, and the terms were pretty standard. The small tribe would agree to pay tribute to the large tribe, and the large tribe would, in turn, provide protection. To ratify the covenant, an animal would be sliced in half and the lesser party would walk through the bloody center as they said: "So may it be done to me if I neglect to attend to the terms of this covenant."

In Exodus 24, after God had led His people out of Egypt, He made a covenant like this with them. He gave them His commandments and promised to bless them if they obeyed His commandments. And they responded:

"All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and **we will be obedient.**" (Exodus 24:7b ESV)

After they swore their obedience to this covenant, it was then ratified in blood. The text says:

And **Moses took the blood and threw it on the people** and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." (Exodus 24:8 ESV)

The problem, of course, is that they did NOT obey! They fell short in every way! And, as a result, they brought themselves under a curse. The blessing of that Old Covenant could only be unlocked by perfect obedience, and that was something that the Israelites proved time and time again that they were incapable of. In their constant disobedience, they invited upon themselves the judgement and disfavor of God.

They needed a way to fulfill the requirements of God's law. They needed a way to satisfy the blood debt that they had incurred upon themselves. They needed Jesus.

Jesus lived the life that we could never live. He obeyed God perfectly in every respect. In this way, he unlocked all of the blessings of the covenant.

But then, he also paid our blood debt for us by dying in our place. When Jesus died on the cross as our substitute, he took the judgement for our covenant breaking upon himself.

In Jesus' life and death, he fulfilled and then closed the chapter on the Old Covenant. And in this final supper, he took hold of the cup and said:

This is my **blood of the covenant**, which is poured out for many (Mark 14:24b ESV)

The Lord's Table is an invitation into a NEW Covenant! It is an invitation into a NEW relationship with God! God still requires perfect obedience in this New Covenant, but that perfect obedience is found in JESUS! Thus, Jesus preached:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel.** (Mark 1:15 ESV)

In this New Covenant, your relationship with God is not contingent upon your obedience, or your merit, or your feelings. Your relationship with God is contingent upon one thing and one thing only – your relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Have you turned from your sin and surrendered to His rule and reign? Have you placed all of your trust in his life, death and resurrection?

Then your sins are forgiven! You are clothed in the righteousness of Christ! When the Father looks at you, He sees Jesus! Your old, heart of stone has been replaced with a new heart of flesh! The Holy Spirit is inside of you, transforming you from the inside out! A place has been prepared for you in the kingdom of heaven! Isn't that amazing?!

THIS is the meal where we celebrate THAT! This meal is the symbol of that covenant. This meal reminds us that we are weak, but he is strong. It reminds us that we have no right in and of ourselves to God's blessing, but that Jesus purchased that blessing for us and has shared it with us generously. See that again today! Trust in that today! Rest in that today!

The Lord's Table is a sign that God has done a NEW THING!

Finally, the Lord's Table is:

4. A foretaste of the future

While we are inclined to look back at the cross when we celebrate the Table, we should notice that Jesus also invited us to look forward. He said:

Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until **that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.**" (Mark 14:25 ESV)

In Matthew's account, he further clarifies what Jesus has in mind for that day in the kingdom:

I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day **when I drink it new with you** in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:29 ESV)

Do you see that? Jesus tells us to drink this cup – to remember the new covenant that was ratified with his blood – and to continue to do so until the day when we will share this cup WITH HIM! One day, we will sit down with Jesus for a feast in the new heavens and the new earth.

In this way, the Lord's Supper is almost like the amuse bouche. It's amazing! It whets the appetite! But its purpose is actually to prepare you for the main course that is coming.

That's one of the functions of the Lord's Table. It is meant to draw our eyes forward with anticipation.

Jesus commanded us to eat this bread and to drink this cup UNTIL HE COMES. And, when he comes, he says he's going to share this meal with us in His Father's Kingdom. Can you imagine that? Take a minute and try.

Imagine the new heavens and the new earth – imagine a world that no longer has any of the scars of sin. No more sickness, no more darkness, no more death and decay, no more mosquitoes (please, no more mosquitoes)... A return to the Garden of Eden! A return to the life that God made us to enjoy forever!

And we will be in our perfect, glorified, resurrected bodies. And we will be with our loved ones who passed on before us in the faith. And we will be with the brothers and sisters in Christ that we disciplined in the faith. We'll all be together. I imagine an outdoor garden with tables spread out as far as the eye can see alive with the sounds of joy and laughter.

And then, a hush will fall over the garden. And the scene will unfold that the Apostle John describes in Revelation 19:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;

⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹ And the angel said to me, “Write this: **Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.**” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” (Revelation 19:6-9 ESV)

Has God opened your eyes to see your sin? Has He enabled you to turn away from your former life? Has He taken out your cold heart and provided you with a heart that loves and treasures Him? Has He lifted up your weary hands and enabled you to lay hold of Jesus in faith?

Then you have been invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And this – this Lord’s Table – is just a foretaste. So, come.

Feast.

Delight.

Believe!

Anticipate!

Wonder!

Give thanks!

Because this is the lifeblood of the church! This is the Thanksgiving feast! And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray together.