

The Passion

*And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.”
(Luke 23:3 ESV)*

*Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And
having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46 ESV)*

The Last Supper

February 26th, 2023

Luke 22:7-23

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 22.

Historically, many churches set apart the 40 days before Holy Week to fast and to prepare their hearts for the celebration of Good Friday and Easter¹. This 40-day season of preparation is called “Lent”.

Now, let me be absolutely clear: We don’t HAVE to observe Lent. This practice is NOT commanded in the Bible. We’ve *chosen* to observe Lent as a church this year, but we might skip it next year, because we’re not *bound* to it. Many of you will choose not to fast over the next 40 days, and that will not make you any more or less of a Christian than those who *do* choose to fast. Your conscience should not be bound by any human tradition.

But that begs the question: If this practice isn’t commanded in the Bible, then why even bother? Why interrupt our preaching series? Why open the door for arguments? Is this worth it?

Truthfully, I went back and forth on this, but let me tell you why I landed here. Good Friday and Easter Sunday require *and deserve* an emotional bandwidth that does not come naturally to us. The spiritual depth of Good Friday and the resurrection joy of Easter call for notes of praise that we need to work to cultivate.

¹ Trevin Wax has written an excellent article here: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/evangelicals-embracing-and-rejecting-lent/>

So, for the next six Sundays, we're going to prepare our hearts. We're going to fix our gaze on the cross. We're going to lay aside some of the earthly pleasures that numb us to heaven's joys. And to help us in that process, we are going to worship our way through Luke's account of the final days of Jesus' earthly life. Our passage this morning describes the institution of the Lord's Supper – a meal that took place on the night that Jesus was betrayed – the Thursday before Good Friday. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

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.

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." 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. (Luke 22:7-23 ESV)

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

The opening details of this story are fascinating! Jesus sends a small group of his disciples ahead with this curious instruction:

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 (Luke 22:10b ESV)

Women typically carried the jars of water, so this man who Jesus had prepared would be readily identifiable by the disciples, but he would be conspicuous enough so as not to draw attention. This

man would then lead the disciples to the master of the house, who would lead them to an upper room where they would find all the supplies that they need. These opening verses almost sound like a scene out of a spy movie.

Jesus is being so careful here so as to avoid his arrest. Yet, immediately after the meal, Jesus walks out to the garden to pray knowing full well that he will be betrayed there by Judas. But why was he so careful in the day, but so careless at night? Did he let his guard down? Did Judas catch him by surprise?

No, Jesus knew that the betrayal was coming. However, he was absolutely determined to share THIS meal at THIS time with his disciples. As we prepare to study this text, we need to see first of all that this meal clearly MATTERED to Jesus! He made the arrangements. He set the stage. He means for us to see something significant here.

Why? What was so significant about this meal? What do we see in this, the first Lord's Supper?

What Do We See In The First Lord's Supper?

First, we see:

1. The gospel made visible

It's important for us to remember the occasion for this first Lord's Supper. In verse 8, we read:

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." (Luke 22:7-8 ESV)

The meal that Jesus and his disciples shared that night – the meal that became the Lord's Supper – was the Passover². Here, Jesus is intentionally picking up an old celebration and INFUSING it

² "All our Gospels agree that the crucifixion took place on a Friday in the Passover season, but whether the Passover coincided with the Lord's Supper (as it seems to do in the Synoptics) or with the crucifixion itself (as John seems to say) is one of the most difficult questions in New Testament interpretation." Leon Morris, *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 320.

with GOSPEL significance! Therefore, if we want to see what we are meant to see in the Lord's Supper we first need to understand the Passover.

The Passover was a meal that the Jews celebrated every year to commemorate their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. We've been singing a new song with the line, "I don't know what you're doing, but I know what you've done"³ – well, if an Old Testament Jew ever sang that song, her mind would immediately jump back to THIS story! The Passover was instituted so that later generations would not forget what God had done! It was the freedom feast! It was the deliverance party!

At the centre of the Passover meal was a lamb. Before the tenth and final plague – the plague that led Pharaoh to release the Israelites – God commanded His people to kill a spotless lamb and to paint the doorposts of their homes with its blood. That night, God sent an angel of death to judge the Egyptians for their wickedness. He killed the firstborn son of every home – except for the homes that were marked by the blood of the lamb. These homes were "passed over".

So, the Passover was a celebration of deliverance, but that celebration always included a reminder of the cost. The Israelites lived because the spotless lamb died.

Jesus makes it loud and clear in this passage that the Passover is like a neon sign pointing straight to him. The Passover prepared us to recognize the one who would finally and truly lead his people into freedom! And the Passover prepared us to recognize that our freedom was purchased at a great cost. Look with me again at verses 19-20:

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. (Luke 22:19-20 ESV)

Now, Jesus isn't saying here that we are LITERALLY eating his physical body and drinking his physical blood when we partake of communion. He is using the same kind of illustrative language that John the Baptist used when he pointed at Jesus and declared:

³ Shane and Shane, *You've Already Won*.

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

Jesus is not a literal lamb, and neither does the bread become literal flesh.

However, Jesus IS in some sense present in the bread and in the cup, because the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:

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?** (1 Corinthians 10:16 ESV)

The Lord's Supper is *more* than a mere memorial. It is, in some sense, a *participation*.

Listen: Jesus is *spiritually* nourishing us as we come to the Lord's Supper. Did you know that? We're not simply remembering. We're *partaking*. To jump back to the Passover language, the Israelites were only saved by the blood of the lamb if they *applied the blood* to their doorposts. Well, similarly, we are only saved by the blood of Jesus if – by faith – we have applied *his* blood to the doorposts of our hearts. We do that by repenting of our sins and placing our trust in Jesus and we, in a sense, act that out each time we partake of the Lord's Supper. Matthew Henry writes:

The Lord's supper is a sermon to the eye⁴

It is the gospel made visible. That's the first and – I would argue – the primary thing that we see in this first Lord's Supper. But there's more. Second, we see:

2. The inauguration of a new covenant

Look again at verse 20. As Jesus picked up the cup, he said:

This cup that is poured out for you is **the new covenant in my blood**. (Luke 22:20b ESV)

Here, his language shifts from the language of Passover to the language of covenant.

⁴ Matthew Henry, Commentary on the Whole Bible (Unabridged), Accordance electronic ed. 6 vols.; (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), paragraph 37145.

Apart from wedding ceremonies, our culture doesn't speak in the language of covenants, but they were common in the Ancient Near Eastern world. Small, vulnerable tribes frequently made covenant agreements with larger nations. The weaker tribe would agree to pay tribute to the stronger tribe, and the stronger tribe would, in turn, provide protection. To seal the covenant, an animal would be sliced in half and the lesser party would walk through the bloody center while they declared: "So may it be done to me if I fail to live up to my side of this covenant."

God related to His people using this language. 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. 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 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)

With that, the covenant was established. The problem, however, 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. But none of us are capable of that.

That is why in Romans 8:2 the Apostle Paul refers to the Law – the stipulations of the old covenant – as the Law of sin and death. We can't do it!

We can't fulfill the requirements of God's law. We all fall short. We are all covenant breakers.

Therefore, the old covenant left us under a curse.

But Jesus, through his perfect obedience and his blood that was shed on our behalf, has fulfilled the requirements of the old covenant!

The Lord's Table is an invitation into something NEW! It is an invitation into something BETTER! God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah and told us that a new covenant was coming:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when **I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.** And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for **they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. **For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**” (Jeremiah 31:31-34 ESV)

The prophet Ezekiel elaborates further. In Ezekiel 36, we read:

And I will give you a new heart, and **a new spirit I will put within you.** And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:26-27 ESV)

In the New Covenant that Jesus has inaugurated, we have received the Holy Spirit! Now we have power to obey! Power to love! Power to forgive! Power to live the life that we were always intended to live! We have forgiveness! We have a new heart! We have a new relationship with God! Do you think about THAT when you come to the Lord's Supper? Because you should! Jesus said:

This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. (Luke 22:20b ESV)

FOR YOU! A New Covenant! Purchased by the blood of Jesus!

Your relationship with God is not contingent on your works. Jesus has accomplished everything that needed to be accomplished.

Your relationship with God is not ruined by sin. Jesus took the sin that should separate you from God and he paid it in full!

Your relationship with God is not limited by your hard heart. God Himself has entered into your heart and is daily, degree by degree, transforming you from the inside out.

Those are the scandalous terms of this new covenant! Everything has changed! Everything is better!

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!

Third, as we come to the Lord's Supper, we see:

3. The anticipation of a coming kingdom

This is a piece that we often miss. As one author explains:

The Lord's Supper doesn't just look back to the cross; it also looks forward to the coming of God's kingdom. It looks forward to a time when Jesus himself will feast with his people.⁵

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:

For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine **until the kingdom of God comes.**" (Luke 22:18 ESV)

In Matthew's account, he further clarifies:

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)

⁵ Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding the Lord's Supper*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 21.

Do you see that? Jesus tells us that we should drink this cup with one eye looking forward to the day when we will share this cup WITH HIM in GLORY! One day, we will sit down with Jesus for a feast in the new heavens and the new earth!

At the risk of being misunderstood – there should be a hint of dissatisfaction when you come to the Lord’s Supper. Not a dissatisfaction with Jesus. Not a dissatisfaction with his sacrifice. Not a dissatisfaction with this new covenant. But a dissatisfaction with our present brokenness.

As we eat this forgiveness feast – as we celebrate the inauguration of a new covenant – we are surrounded by sin. That adds a dissonance to the Supper, doesn’t it? We see sin in the news, sin in our church, sin in our kids, sin in our spouses and sin in the person looking back at us in the mirror. Do you feel the world is broken? We do!

The Lord’s Supper is like an appetizer for heaven. It’s a foretaste of what is to come! It’s amazing – but it is not the main course. The Lord’s Supper prepares us for the main course that is coming.

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... 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. We’ll all be together. And there won’t be any more sin in us, and there won’t be any more sin in the world. The dissonance that we are all feeling today will be a distant memory.

And then, having taken our seats at the table, 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)

This supper is preparing us for THAT supper!

This table is reminding us that we have a seat at THAT table!

As you come this morning broken and wearied by this fallen world and disillusioned by your own weakness and shortcomings, let that dissonance increase your appetite for the kingdom that this meal points forward to.

But, as much as I’d like to close on that beautiful note, there is one final, frightening detail that we see in the first Lord’s Supper, and that is:

4. The ongoing presence of hypocrisy

This is a difficult note to land on, but it IS where Luke lands. Look again at verses 21-23 where Jesus says:

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. (Luke 22:21-23 ESV)

Even at the very first Lord's Supper, there was a hypocrite at the table.

The word hypocrisy comes from the Greek word for a stage actor. A hypocrite is a person who wears a mask and plays a part – a person like Judas.

Judas had already made arrangements to betray Jesus. Luke records those details in verses 3-6. And yet, knowing full well what he was about to do, Judas still ate the bread and drank the cup.

And that same treachery has happened countless times as the people of God have gathered to partake of the Lord's Supper. Dare I say, even this morning, there will likely be someone who will partake even though you know that you're wearing a mask. Perhaps, like Judas, you've already made plans for your sin.

You've already decided you're going to keep harbouring that grudge. You're going to keep watching that porn. You're going to keep cheating on your taxes. You're going to keep going with that affair. You're going to keep getting drunk with those buddies. You're going to keep wearing the mask. And you're going to eat the bread and drink the cup today just like you did last month, and the month before. You're going to betray Jesus

And Jesus says, "Behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table."

The Apostle Paul warned:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. (1 Corinthians 11:27-30 ESV)

"But didn't you just say that Jesus has washed away our sin? Didn't you say that we come, not on our merit but on Christ's? Didn't you say that this is the forgiveness feast?" Yes! And Romans 6 says:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² **By no means!** How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Romans 6:1-2 ESV)

If you are in Christ – if you have confessed your sin and placed your trust in him – if his blood has been applied to the doorposts of your heart – then you are DEAD TO SIN! That doesn't mean that you'll never stumble, but it DOES mean that you will not play the game of wearing a mask.

Is there a pattern of sin in your life? Is there something that has mastered you? Confess it to God, surrender it to Christ, trust in his blood, and leave that FILTH behind as you come to His table.

And if you're not willing to leave it behind, then don't play the part of Judas. Don't wear the mask. God sees right through it.

He's offering you the greatest gift in the history of the universe! He's inviting you to know Him and love Him and enjoy Him FOREVER in the glory of the new heavens and the new earth!

Hear me: This Supper is NOT for the perfect people, or the deserving people. But it IS for the people who – by the grace of God – can say, "I am letting everything else go so that I can receive this incredible gift!" If that's you, then come to the table and see the gospel made visible! Celebrate the new covenant that Jesus has inaugurated! Anticipate the glory that is to come!

But if that's not you, then let it pass you by.

For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:29 ESV)

Our worship team is going to lead us in a song of response as we prepare our hearts, and then one of our elders will come forward to pray for us.