

From Passover to the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:1, 7–20)

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Brian Watson

When I was a child, there were many things that I did not understand about life, about God, and about church. One of those things was the Lord's Supper. I remember going to church, where once a month some broken pieces of bread were passed around on shiny plates and thimble-sized plastic cups of grape juice were distributed. The pastor would say, "The body of Christ, broken for you. Take and eat," and, "The blood of Christ, shed for you. Take and drink." I had no idea what he meant by eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood, but I went along with the program and I didn't ask any questions.

Now that I've matured, I understand the Lord's Supper better and I hope that you do, too. Yet I think that the taking of the Lord's Supper isn't understood by many. And this practice probably seems very bizarre to non-Christians. What are we doing when we take this little bit of food and this little bit of drink? Why do we do it? What does it all mean?

What is the Lord's Supper? It's one of two ordinances, sometimes called sacraments, that the church observes. The other is baptism. According to the Puritan, Thomas Watson, "The sacrament is a visible sermon. . . . The Word is a trumpet to proclaim Christ, the sacrament is a glass to represent him."¹ Both the Lord's Supper and baptism are visible sermons, pictures of what Jesus has done for us.

The Lord's Supper presents a visible picture of the gospel, specifically Jesus' substitutionary, atoning death. He died in our place, as our substitute, to atone for our sins. Yet there is more to the Lord's Supper than this. The Lord's Supper is based on the Last Supper, the final meal Jesus ate with his disciples before he was arrested, tried, and crucified. At this meal, all the great themes of the Bible coalesce, for the Last Supper had associations with the past, present, and future. Likewise, the Lord's Supper is rooted in history; it affects our present; and it contains promises for our future.

Today, we're returning to the Gospel of Luke, one of four biographies of Jesus found in the Bible. We're beginning chapter 22. Today, we're going to look at the passages related to

¹ Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Supper* (1665; repr., Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004), 1-2.

Jesus' last Passover meal that he shared with his disciples before he died on the next day. Then, in the next sermon, I'll look at the verses related to Judas' betrayal of Jesus.

So, we'll begin with Luke 22:1, which says, "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover."²

What was the Passover? Let us review some Old Testament history.

In Genesis, God chose Abraham and his family as the people he would use to bless the world. At the end of Genesis, this family ends up in Egypt, where Joseph, Abraham's great-grandson, is second in command. At the beginning of Exodus, something has changed. About 400 years have passed by and the Israelites have multiplied greatly, but they no longer find favor in the Egyptians' eyes. Instead, the Egyptians oppress and enslave them. God looks upon them with compassion and, because of his covenant with Abraham, he prepares to deliver them through the ministry of Moses. God tells Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand that he let the Israelites go. Pharaoh refuses because of the hardness of his heart, so God hits the Egyptians with nine plagues. Pharaoh still refuses to let the Israelites go, so God sends a tenth and final plague.

This time, all the firstborn in Egypt will die. The first nine plagues did not affect the Israelites, but this time, in order to avoid the tenth plague, they must do something. They are to take male, year-old, unblemished lambs, slaughter them, and place some of their blood on their door frames. When God comes to kill all the firstborn in Egypt, he will pass over the houses of the Israelites because of the blood. God tells them to commemorate this occasion by roasting the meat of the lambs and eating it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They are to do this with their belts fastened, their sandals on their feet, and their staffs in hand, because they will soon leave Egypt, for Pharaoh will now let them go. God tells them to keep this feast once a year to remember the event. The Passover is so important that God even tells them that the month of this event will now be the first month of their calendar year.

So, that's what the Passover was. Now, I'm going to skip to verse 7. We'll come back to verses 2–6 in the next sermon in this series. Here are verses 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

² All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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.

Jesus is about to eat the Passover meal with his disciples. He sends two of his closest followers, Peter and John, to prepare this meal, which had to be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem.

It seems that Jesus has made prior arrangements to have the meal in an upper room. Peter and John would have had to prepare a lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs, the elements of the original Passover meal. Other elements were added over the years: a bowl of saltwater, a fruit puree or sauce, and four cups of diluted wine. Each element was very symbolic. The lamb reminded them of the sacrifice needed to be saved. The Israelites were sinners like the Egyptians, and the only way to be spared God’s judgment against sin was for someone to die in their place. The unleavened bread reminded them of God’s swift deliverance of his people—there wasn’t time for the bread to rise. The herbs reminded them of the bitterness of their slavery. The saltwater reminded them of tears shed in captivity as well as the Red Sea. The fruit paste reminded them of the clay used to make bricks for the Egyptians. And the four cups of wine symbolized the promises found in Exodus 6:6–7, that God would deliver them from slavery, that he would judge the Egyptians, that they would have a special relationship with God (“I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God”), and that they would know that he is “the LORD your God.”

Normally, a family would eat this meal together. Jesus chose to share it with his disciples. They had become his family. During the Passover meal, there would be a time when the host of the meal recalled the Passover narrative, explaining the redemptive history behind the feast and expressing thanksgiving. Listen to this statement from the collection of Jewish oral traditions known as the Mishnah. The parallels with our redemption should be obvious:

Therefore are we bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honour, to exalt, to extol, and to bless him who wrought all these wonders for our fathers and for us. He brought us out from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a Festival-day, and from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption, so let us say before him the *Hallelujah*.³

³ *Pesahim* 10.5, quoted in I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper* (1980; repr., Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 22.

The celebration would include the singing of Psalms 113 through 118. After the fourth glass of wine, the meal would end, and the guests were supposed to spend the night in prayer.

Before we look at verses 14–20, allow me to make an observation. It is no coincidence that the Last Supper is a Passover meal. The Passover and the whole Exodus form the greatest act of redemption in the Old Testament. There are numerous references to this event in the Old Testament as well as the New. You can find it mentioned throughout the historical books, there are several Psalms devoted to it, and the prophets refer to this event repeatedly. In short, the Exodus proved that God does mighty acts to save his people.

By connecting the Last Supper to the Passover, God is showing us the relationship between the greatest act of redemption in the Old Testament and *the* greatest act of redemption. He is showing us how his plan of redemption spans across the Old and New Testaments.

God is sovereign over history. He can make history do what he wants. Throughout history, he revealed himself and his plans gradually, through not only his word but also through people, events, and institutions that we find in the Old Testament. Certain events in the Old Testament anticipate greater events in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, we see certain types, or foreshadows, that anticipate the work of Jesus. We see certain people in the Old Testament that resemble Christ, but they are imperfect saviors, prophets, priests, and kings. We see acts of redemption in the Old Testament, but they do not conquer sin and death. We also see acts of judgment in the Old Testament, often coupled with those acts of redemption, though they are not the final judgment that will occur when Jesus returns to Earth. These types in the Old Testament taught the people of that time about God and gave them clues that greater events were going to occur in the future. For us, on this side of the cross, they provide a context for Jesus' ministry, so that we can see how he fulfilled all the promises of God in the Old Testament.

Here are a few things we can learn, as Christians, from the Passover. One, it anticipated Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. We know this because the apostle Paul tells us that Jesus is our Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). Peter tells us that we were ransomed from sin "with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:19). The redemption of the Israelites out of Egypt was accomplished through a blood sacrifice. Though they were freed from slavery to the Egyptians, the Passover did not deal with their slavery to sin. No animal sacrifice could atone for human sin. Therefore, the Passover was an incomplete redemption and a mere foretaste of Jesus' greater, perfect redemption.

Two, the Passover and the Exodus show us that God is powerful, that he performs amazing acts of redemption, and that he is to be feared. For those of you familiar with the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, and the image of Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, you know how powerful and frightening God can be. God is still a holy and jealous God. He is still a consuming fire. It is important that we still have that image of God.

Three, we see that God graciously saved his people even though they were sinful. The Israelites were often not any better than the people of other nations. God simply decided to be gracious to them. Their salvation was not based on their obedience and their goodness, and neither is ours.

Four, in Exodus, there is a phrase that God tells Moses to say to Pharaoh: “Let my people go, that they may serve me” (Exod. 7:15; 8:1, 20; 9:1). God freed the Israelites from the yoke of slavery to the Egyptians, but they were not rescued so that they could live for themselves. If you have faith in Christ, you are freed from slavery to sin, but you still have a master. Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:29–30). We are freed from the yoke of sin in order to serve the King of kings and Lord of lords.

It’s important to understand the Passover and what it means for us. Now, let’s see what happens when Jesus shares this meal with his disciples. Let’s read verses 14–20:

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.

Jesus wanted this last opportunity to teach his disciples the significance of his impending death. He knows he is about to die, and yet he is in complete control. In fact, his vague directions to Peter and John in the previous section were probably intentional: he wanted to make sure that Judas did not know the address of this upper room so that the meal would not be interrupted by a premature arrest. (We’ll talk more about this next time.)

Jesus is acting as host of the Passover meal, yet instead of recounting the Exodus story, he starts to teach them about the theological significance of his death. Jesus tells his disciples that he will not eat this meal again until “it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” He will not share in such a meal until the kingdom is consummated, when he returns.

Then, Jesus takes one cup and gives it to his disciples. This is probably either the first or second of the four cups of wine of the Passover meal. It is a common cup that he shares with his disciples, just as it is a common loaf of bread. This meal scene is one of intimacy and unity. It seems completely natural to read about people eating, but we must remember that Jesus is not just a man; he’s also God. God is eating with humans! God dwells among us and desires close fellowship with us. What an amazing idea!

In verse 18, Jesus says he “will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” The kingdom was inaugurated with Jesus’ first coming, but it will not come in its fullest form until he returns and recreates the universe to be Paradise. In this passage, Jesus twice refers to a future fulfillment of the kingdom of God. He wants his disciples to know that, even though he will die, death will not have the last word.

Then, Jesus takes the bread and gives it to his disciples. Here, Jesus begins to reinterpret the elements of the Passover meal in a radical way. The bread and the wine of the Passover meal will correspond to Jesus’ death.

Jesus takes the bread, a symbol of life and sustenance, and makes it a symbol of his death. Elsewhere, Jesus had called himself the bread of life (John 6:35, 48) because he is the source of eternal life. In order to impart that life to those who have faith in him, his body would have to be broken. Animals die so we can eat their flesh. Grain is crushed so that we can live. Even grapes were crushed so that their juice could be extracted and fermented. It is possible that the references to bread being broken and wine being poured out are references to a famous passage in Isaiah 53, one that we looked at two weeks ago. Isaiah 53:5 says, “But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities.” A few verses later, we read, “Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand” (Isa. 53:10). God the Father had to pour out his wrath on someone, for sin must not go unpunished. God is a perfect judge. He cannot let evil go unchecked. But God is also gracious. He gave his Son to take the punishment that his people deserve. And willingly Jesus

took that punishment in our place. He was crushed so that we don't have to be. That was God's will. It was always his plan.

Notice that Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." Israelites were supposed to remember the Passover, but when they did, they didn't just bring a past event to mind. Rather, they saw themselves as participants in the Exodus. In that way, it affected their present life. They also anticipated a future redemption that would come through the Messiah. For us, we should remember Jesus' death, not in order simply to review history, but in order for our lives to be changed. We, too, should also look forward to Christ's return, when he makes all things new.

We should also notice that, in saying, "Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus isn't saying, "Do this in order to be saved," or, "Do this to receive more grace." Catholics believe that the eucharist (their word for the Lord's Supper) imparts grace and is a key part of salvation. But Jesus doesn't say anything like that.

Finally, Jesus distributes the cup, which commentators agree corresponds to the third cup of the Passover meal. He says, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." The "pouring out" likely refers to Isaiah 53:12: "Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors." In the Bible, blood represents life (Lev. 17:11). In order to bear the sins of many, Jesus had to die in the place of many. Because of our sin, we should die eternally, yet Jesus took our sin and nailed it to the cross, so that we could be credited his righteousness. As it says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

We also come to the important idea of the covenant. A covenant is a bit like a contract. It is a binding commitment that is made unilaterally, which is to say there is no negotiating. God sets the terms of the agreement and he faithfully keeps his end of the arrangement. There are many covenants in the Bible: ones made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, as well as the new covenant. The two covenants in view here are the "old covenant," the one made through Moses at Mount Sinai, and the new covenant.

After God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, he made a covenant with them. He said that if they obeyed him, then they would be his "treasured possession among all peoples" and "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (see Exod. 19:4-6). God then gave Moses and the

Israelites the Ten Commandments as well as many other laws. This covenant was based on a condition: *if* the people obeyed those laws, *then* they would be God's treasured possession.

After the law was given, a ceremony was held to inaugurate this covenant. In Exodus 24, Moses and the people offer animal sacrifices and Moses reads them the law. The people said they would obey the law. Then something very strange happens: Moses takes some of the blood of those animal sacrifices and threw it on the people. There are two important ideas behind this strange event: One, the people of Israel were God's people because they were made clean from a blood sacrifice. Two, if they failed to obey the terms of the covenant, the result would be the shedding of blood—their blood! Most covenants began with blood, a reminder of the consequences of breaking that contract. And if that contract was broken, blood would be shed.

We know from the Old Testament that Israel was not perfectly obedient to God. In fact, they were often wildly disobedient. The same is true of all human beings. We often ignore God instead of living for him. We fail to love God as we should. We fail to love one another. We don't do life on God's terms; instead, we act as if we were gods.

In the end, the old covenant simply didn't work. There's no way that mere human beings could obey its terms. Therefore, God would establish a new covenant. This was promised in Jeremiah 31:31–34, but there are other passages in the Old Testament prophets that speak of a new covenant. In short, the new covenant promised that all of God's people would be forgiven of sin, would truly know God because they have a right relationship with him, and would have God's laws written on their hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the triune God.

The new covenant is better than the old covenant. But that was by design. God's plan is perfect. He knew his people could not obey the old covenant. God's intention was to show that only one son person could ever obey that old covenant, and that person was Jesus. The only way the old covenant could be fulfilled was to have God become man and live a life of perfect obedience. He fulfilled the terms of the old covenant. But—and this is the amazing part—though he alone fulfilled those terms, he took on the penalty that covenant breakers deserve. He died on the cross to take away the penalty that we all deserve for our sin.

What Jesus is saying at this Last Supper with his disciples is basically this: “What I'm about to do is the key to God's eternal plan of redemption. My blood sacrifice will pay the penalty of the old covenant for you, and my blood will usher in a new, fulfilled covenant. People

who are part of this covenant will never pay for their sins. Your sins will be forgiven, and you will have new hearts.”

The fact that Jesus asks his disciples to do this in remembrance of him means that he expects that they will take it regularly after his death. We understand that the Lord’s Supper, which we take here once a month, is based on this Last Supper. It is a time to remember that Jesus died for our sins.

What does all of this mean for us? How does this affect our view of the Lord’s Supper?

First, we should see how great Jesus is. I hope you now have a deeper understanding of just how central his life, death, and resurrection is to all of history, to God’s plans, and to your life. Jesus is the greatest. He is truly the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of history, and the author and goal of our faith.

Second, food in the Bible is often a symbol for spiritual sustenance. Of course, we need to eat food regularly to live. But we also have spiritual hunger and thirst, a longing for something that the things of this world cannot satisfy. Jesus is the only one who can satisfy the deepest yearnings of your soul. In John 6:27, Jesus says, “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.” Are you trying to fill your spiritual hunger with Jesus or something else? No money, no job, no other relationship, no amount of pleasures and entertainments will satisfy that spiritual hunger and thirst.

Third, though we’re not told this here, the Lord’s Supper is reserved for God’s people. It doesn’t automatically give you spiritual life. Only faith in Jesus gives you that. And faith in Jesus is trusting in him. That faith should lead to love of Jesus and obedience to him.

Fourth, we’re also told that elsewhere that the Lord’s Supper is a time to examine our lives. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:28, “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” It’s a time for us to ask certain questions, like, “Do I know God? Am I living as his servant? Are there ways that I’m disobeying him? Do I have sins I need to repent of?” If you are not a Christian, I urge you to trust in Jesus. Faith in Jesus is the only way to be spared God’s judgment against your sin, your failure to love and live for God. If you’re not yet a Christian, I would love to talk to you personally about following Jesus. If you’re struggling with sin, I would love to help you in any way I can.

Fourth, the Last Supper and the Lord’s Supper call us to be a community. Jesus shared a common cup and a common loaf with his disciples. Though we come to faith in Christ

individually, when we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, we enter the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, Paul writes, “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? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” Are you an active part of the body of Christ? Are you using your spiritual gifts to serve the church? Or do you just come to consume a spiritual product and live life alone? God meant for us to be in relationship with him and with each other. I would encourage all of us to be more involved in the life of this church, to be more committed, to become members. Take ownership of this church. Regard it as your family.

My fifth and final point is this: The Last Supper looked backwards to the Passover. And it looked forward to when Jesus would not only die for his people, but also to when he would return to complete the establishment of God’s kingdom on Earth. The Lord’s Supper looks back to when Jesus died for us, but it also looks forward to when Jesus will return to make all things right. And when that happens, we who are Christians will eat a meal with God.

There are several places in the Bible where this new creation is pictured as a great meal. We read one of those passages, Isaiah 25, last week. God promised that in his new creation, there would be the finest of feasts. That could be a literal meal—which might be a comfort to those of us who love to eat—or it could symbolize the kind of fellowship that we cannot imagine right now. Either way, God will make all things new, he will eradicate death, and he will offer us the very best food and fellowship that we could ever hope for. At that time, we will commune directly with God. All his people, those who know him, those who have been forgiven of sin, those who have been given the Holy Spirit, will live forever in God’s house.

When we take the Lord’s Supper together, we remember what Jesus did for us: His body was broken and his life drained out so that we don’t have to be broken, so that we can live. And when we take the Lord’s Supper, we experience a foretaste of what will come in the future. We will eat and drink together in the presence of God. We can take the Lord’s Supper with seriousness, remembering that it cost nothing short of the death of the God-man, Jesus Christ, to rescue us from sin and eternal death. But we can also take it with thanksgiving and joy, knowing that God loves us so much that he gave us his Son, and that the Son laid down his life willingly for his people, to bring them back to the table in his house.