

The Lord's Supper
Matthew 26:17-30
May 5th, 2019

Big idea: Christians take the Lord's Supper to remember His vicarious sacrifice and anticipate our future fellowship with Him.

Introduction:

Today 100's of millions of Christians will take some bread and take some juice or wine, and take communion together. Some will be gathered in mega churches of 10,000 people. Others will be around coffee tables in their living rooms. Some will be outside or under a canopy made of branches and leaves. Some will whisper so their neighbors don't hear and report them.

Why? What does it mean? How should we practice communion? How often? Who should be allowed to partake together? Why do the little crackers taste so bad?

In Matthew 26 today we'll see Jesus institute what we call the Lord's Supper or communion. We'll walk through the narrative but I want to give some good time to discussing common questions people have about communion.

1. Preparing the Passover (26:17-19)

- a. Passover was followed by the week-long feast of unleavened bread so the two were often viewed as joined together with the Passover referred to as the first day of Unleavened Bread.
- b. It appears that Jesus has prearranged for a certain man to have the Passover at his home.
 - i. In Luke's account they are to look for a man carrying a pitcher of water, a task that would usually be done by a woman in their culture, so he would stand out. (Luke 22:10)
- c. The disciples did this and prepared the Passover. What is involved in preparing the Passover?
 - i. They would need to bring the lamb with them to be sacrificed by the priests at the temple court in the afternoon, the other elements of the meal would need to be gathered – the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, the charoset (mixture with apple, nuts, honey, other herbs), the wine
- d. They would gather in the evening to eat the meal, after sundown.
 - i. It was a detailed meal, loaded with symbolism, some of which we had explained for us at the Messiah in the Passover event we had a month ago.
 - ii. They would begin with a cup of red wine mixed with a double portion of water
 - iii. They would have a ceremonial washing of the hands to emphasis the need for moral and spiritual cleansing and holiness of heart.
 - iv. They would eat bitter herbs to remind them of the bitter bondage in Egypt. They might dip them in the charoset which was sweet but also resembled the mortar that they used in Egypt for making bricks.
 - v. Near the end the roasted Passover lamb would be brought out.
 - vi. Since the exodus from Egypt the Jewish people had been celebrating this meal, so they had been doing so for 1,500 years.
- e. This was the most important religious event of the year for the Jewish people and Jesus, as a Jewish man in a Jewish nation with Jewish disciples, was obedient to the law of God to commemorate this event.

- i. Certainly, Jesus' adversaries that we have encountered in Matthew were Jewish – the pharisees, the scribes, the chief priests – but so were his followers and so was he.
- ii. The 19 year old man who killed one woman and injured 3 others in a synagogue in California last week attended what would be considered a Bible teaching church.
- iii. That reminds us that sometimes we need to say what seems unnecessary to say, that such acts are evil and flow from a distorted view of the world, not from a Biblical view.

2. Identifying the **betrayal** (26:20-25)

- a. They were eating the meal in the evening, reclined Greco-Roman style around a table laying on the left elbow, facing the table, and reaching with their right hands.
- b. He said with certainty that one would betray Him.
 - i. Didn't say who.
 - ii. It's interesting that the disciples didn't respond, "Is it Judas? He looks sketchy."
 - iii. Instead they were grieved and each asked if it was them.
 - 1. They asked in such a way that it anticipated an answer of, "no, it's not you." But they still asked.
 - 2. Perhaps they recognized their own weakness and in fear they wondered if they could have it within them to betray their Lord.
 - 3. Dan Doriani – the weaknesses of the men at the meal established the need for the meal.
- c. He appears to narrow down more by saying "he who dipped his hand with me in the bowl is the one"
 - i. But that doesn't really narrow it down. All of them would have likely dipped bread or the bitter herbs in a common bowl with Him at some point that evening.
 - ii. Rather, the emphasis on the statement is to point out that it was one of them, a close friend, someone that He was sharing this familial meal with.
 - iii. **Psalm 41:9** Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.
 - 1. That heightened the betrayal. To eat together was an outward sign of friendship.
- d. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are clearly displayed. (v. 24)
 - i. It's going to happen just as it was written, meaning just as it was predicted and planned by the Father.
 - ii. But woe to the man who carries out the betrayal.
 - iii. **Acts 2:23** this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.
 - 1. Predetermined plan
 - 2. You nailed to the cross
 - iv. Mystery but not ambiguity – clear that both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are communicated
 - v. Perhaps one final appeal to Judas to repent but he refused.

- e. Judas finally asks the same question. "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?"
 - i. The rest called Jesus Lord, Judas calls Him Rabbi. Perhaps significant.
 - ii. Jesus essentially gave an affirmative

3. Instituting the **Lord's Supper** (26:26-30)

In the middle of a meal that was already intensely symbolic, Jesus introduced one of the two enduring ordinances of the church – communion (the other would be baptism).

Ordinance simply means a structure of life or a law (like a city ordinance)

He used the bread and the wine that were already a part of the Passover meal

He gave a customary blessing over the bread that would have been a part of the meal, broke it, gave it to the disciples, and told them to take it and eat, saying "this is My body." Luke tells he also said his body is given for them and they are to do this in remembrance of Him.

Luke 22:19 And when He had taken *some* bread *and* 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."

He then took the cup of wine diluted with water, gave thanks, gave it to them, instructing them to drink from it for this is My blood of the covenant.

Luke 22:20 And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.

Exodus 24:8 So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Carson – Jesus understands the violent and sacrificial death he is about to undergo as the ratification of the covenant he is inaugurating with his people, even as Moses in Ex 24:8 ratified the covenant of Sinai by the shedding of blood.

His blood is poured out for the forgiveness of sins – His death is vicarious, substitutionary, as He dies in our place for our sins.

Eric Bancroft - Taking the history and imagery already understood by the account of the Exodus and God's salvation of his people, Jesus shifted Christians' attention from a blood-soaked mantle to a blood soaked cross and the salvation found in Him alone.

He tells them that he won't drink from the fruit of the vine until he drinks it with them in His Father's kingdom.

His last Passover with them, about to face His death

Looks ahead to His return and our fellowship with Him and each other in His kingdom.

And then they sang a hymn, part of the Passover meal.

- a. Why is it sometimes called the **Eucharist**, **Communion**, the Lord's supper or table, and the **breaking** of bread?
 - i. Each term or phrase is legitimate and has good reasons behind it. Not something to fight over.
 - ii. Eucharist comes from the Greek word for *thanksgiving* when Jesus gave thanks.
 - iii. Communion comes the King James translation of 1 Corinthians 10:16

1. **1 Corinthians 10:16** The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?
2. It emphasizes our union with Christ symbolized through the act of partaking in the bread and the cup
- iv. The Lord's Supper comes from this meal that we just studied. Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 11:20.
- v. Breaking of bread emphasizes that aspect of the meal when Jesus physically broke the bread and passed it around for them to share.
- b. What does Jesus mean when He says of the bread, "This is my **body**"?
 - i. Usually I focus on what the Bible teaches without referencing other specific groups that have a different perspective. But with this topic it's helpful by way of comparison to consider how a couple other groups practice communion and understand it differently.
 - ii. The Catholic church has held to a view known as transubstantiation
 1. which simply means the bread and the wine are actually transformed every time we celebrate communion.
 2. Communion is then a reenactment of Christ's sacrifice as it is literally "His body" even though the elements look and taste the same.
 3. It can lead to the mistaken idea that Jesus is repeatedly sacrificed when communion is taken.
 - a. **1 Peter 3:18** For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust,
 4. Leads to their belief that the act of taking communion itself is transformative for the person, even if they don't understand what it means or what is happening.
 5. However, that would not be a natural understanding for Jesus' disciples because he was still with them when he said "this is my body." His body was still there.
 - iii. The Lutheran church has held to a modified version in which Christ is really present "in, with, and under" the elements but the elements themselves are not transformed.
 - iv. Remembrance/memorial view – Communion is a powerful teaching moment that symbolizes His substitutionary death for us and our response of faith.
 1. We commune with Christ who dwells within us and is spiritually present with His people all the time.
 - v. From *Biblical Doctrine* edited by MacArthur and Mayhue
 1. The Lord's Table is a memorial celebration that strengthens believers in their walk with Christ because it
 - a. **Commemorates** Jesus's substitutionary sacrifice (symbolized by the elements of the bread and the cup)
 - b. **Reminds** believers of the historical truths of the gospel, including Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension
 - c. Prompts believers to **repent** of any known sin

- d. Causes them to rejoice in their redemption from sin and in their saving union with Christ
 - e. Motivates them to continue walking in loving obedience to the Lord
 - f. Reminds them to hope in His imminent return
- vi. It's an act of remembrance, fellowship, and anticipation
 - 1. Our fellowship with one another is emphasized as well, which is why we partake of this as a whole body all together.
 - 2. **1 Corinthians 10:17** Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.
- vii. It pictures the gospel in dramatic form.
 - 1. His life given for our lives.
 - 2. Our need to be forgiven.
 - 3. Our response of faith.
- c. How often should we take communion?
 - i. Some argue once per year because Passover was celebrated once per year and that keeps it special.
 - ii. Others argue that it should be every week when we gather together. Certainly that has been the practice in most of church history.
 - iii. Paul appears to give freedom to the church on this matter
 - 1. 1 Corinthians 11:26a For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
 - iv. Weekly practice allows for a weekly remembrance of the gospel but may lead to it becoming a ritual without the intended meaning.
 - v. We have chosen to practice communion monthly, on the first Sunday of the month, because that gives us regularity and even anticipation.
- d. Who should take communion?
 - i. Extremes – on the one hand are those who say let anyone participate because maybe it will have some effect on them, on the other are those who say only baptized members of that particular church should participate because the elders can have confidence that those people know Christ and are walking in fellowship with Him. It's a desire to protect the table.
 - ii. The meal was for the disciples and it was practiced by believers and Paul does warn about eating and drinking in an unworthy manner. And yet Judas participated even though Jesus knew He would betray Him and He was secretly acting as a thief.
 - iii. All those who know Christ should be allowed to participate because they are part of the universal body of Christ. In general it is best if someone is baptized first because that is the initial ordinance that pictures the believers union with Christ whereas communion is the ongoing ordinance of our continued union with Him. However, wouldn't want to push that too hard because scripture doesn't push that.

- iv. The warning about examining yourself should be taken seriously, and yet it seems like it's an individual examination with personal responsibility.
 - 1. **1 Corinthians 11:28-29** But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.
- e. Who should serve communion?
 - i. Doesn't say. Wise to have an elder overseeing it because it is a teaching role, but handing out the elements is simply an act of service. It's tended to be done by men at UBC as a way to encourage men to take steps of leadership and service, but there isn't a biblical reason that it needs to be restricted to men.
- f. Other common questions
 - i. Should we use wine or grape juice?
 - 1. Jesus used wine but he also referred to it as the 'fruit of the vine' so grape juice would fit that category. Wine can be appropriate but we need to recognize that some people with a bent toward alcoholism would not be able to participate because it is a temptation for them.
 - ii. Why do the crackers taste so bad?
 - 1. Unleavened, dry to last



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