

The Lord's Supper

Matthew 26:26-30

I have no idea how many times I have observed the Lord's Supper as a minister of gospel, how many times I have distributed the elements as I did here this morning. A quick estimate would be well over one thousand, maybe 1500 times. And I say virtually the same thing each time I distribute those elements, not because I am unable or unwilling to consider other words, but because the words I use are Jesus' own words, "Take, eat; this is my body." And with the cup I say, "Drink from it, all of you."

Week after week. The same thing. And there is a danger in that. A rather significant danger—that you stop hearing those words. The danger is that I would stop meaning those words when I speak them, that we together might simply go through the motions without ever sensing the hugely significant experience that those words express. And I so as I devote an entire sermon this afternoon to the study of Jesus' words of institution for this sacrament, I do so in the effort to avoid that great danger. I often say it this way, and I emphasize it here at this point—I find the Lord's Supper to be the closest experience of heaven that we experience while living out our lives on earth. The observance of the sacrament is the closest thing we have in this age to what we will enjoy in the age to come, in the new heaven and new earth. This is as close to heaven as we can get, and by faith, by the blessing of God the Holy Spirit, we can experience that taste of heaven as we eat and drink of these elements.

It's not just the enjoyment and benefit of gathering together, it's not just the element of communion and fellowship. But rather it is the sacramental expression of life in heaven itself that we enjoy together as we worship, and especially as we partake of the Lord's Supper as we did this morning.

I almost never use anyone in the congregation as an example or illustration, but I want to note Mike Shields' absence today, noting it because it is so rare and unusual. If you know Mike at all or have talked to him at all about worship, you know there is no place he would rather be. And it just so unsettling to him not to be here, because more than anything else about him, he understands the glory of worship together as a church with its focal point on this sacrament as a means of grace. And if you say, as I have, that the livestream is better than nothing, he'll observe, "Yes, but not much." So great is his sense of the benefit of being together, again, especially with reference to the sacrament. Obviously, he remains at home in an obvious commitment to protect Cindy from any possibility of infection as she takes such powerful immuno-suppression drugs with her new kidney transplant these days and weeks for her surgery. And I mention that to emphasize what I will focus upon the third point of this sermon—our foretaste of heaven.

But let me begin much more broadly, beginning where Jesus begins, which is with the actual passover of the Old Covenant. The sign of the Old Covenant. That is, the sign that marks and identifies God's people of the Old Testament. We've touched on this in the past few weeks as we have studied in Matthew 26, and this afternoon let me note again, this occasion in our text was the occasion of the Passover instituted by God for his people Israel all the way back in the days of Moses. The passover marks the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt.

A lamb would be taken, a lamb without blemish or defect. The lamb would be killed, its blood shed.

Ex. 12:7 "And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. 8 Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Do not

eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. 10 You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 11 And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. 12 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. 13 Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. 14 'So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance."

That's what Jesus was doing with his disciples, and this is the significance, that,

I. THE SIGN OF THE OLD COVENANT BECOMES THE SIGN OF THE NEW COVENANT.

The Old Covenant refers to that relationship God established with his people before the incarnation of Jesus. It was a covenant of grace, that is, God promising salvation to his people by working of his grace, not of works nor any merit in them. He chose the nation of Israel to be his people and, in love, he determined to save them, to redeem them, to bring them up out of the land of slavery. So that's where we begin, with the connection between,

A. The Passover and salvation.

I'm using the words salvation and redemption more or less interchangeably, since I believe redemption is a bit more comprehensive of word for the work of God in salvation, but salvation is the more common and ordinary word. God saves us.

And "the gospel of Christ... is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."

So salvation. The exodus was that salvation in the Old Covenant. Even as the ten commandments are introduced,

Ex. 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

Thus we read,

Ex. 20:6 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. 7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8 but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

I don't want to understate that. It's not that the exodus did what only Jesus himself could do, which is to satisfy the wrath of God as the punishment for our sin, but the passover stands as that historical event in the Old Testament, before Jesus, picture and demonstrating what is was that Jesus would accomplish in his flesh. That's where I like the word redemption! Or deliverance. Salvation. So this is the fullness of the New Testament revelation,

Eph. 1:7 "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

And, Heb. 9:12 "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

But the Passover, in the Old Covenant, is the sacrament which represents that redemption to come. It is the outward sign and seal that those participating identify themselves as the people of God whom he has saved by grace through faith in the Messiah who was to come.

So Jesus took that sacrament, that holy feast, and transformed it into the sign and seal of the New Covenant.
v.26-27

So now we have the connection between,

B. The Lord's Supper and salvation.

Let me say it clearly. The Lord's Supper does not save you. Nor did the Old Testament passover. The sacrament has no power in itself, in its own working. There is nothing magical about it. But what there is a sacramental union a sacramental connection. And thus the sign of the New Covenant is a sign of our salvation, the Lord's supper is a sign of our salvation. It is a sign of God's work to save us. It is a sign of the effectiveness of that work and the evidence of that work. It is a sign that demonstrates the reality of our salvation, and a sign that God uses to declare that salvation to us as a means of his glorious grace.

It's not just a memorial service, commemorating Jesus' death. It is not a funeral banquet at which we grieve for the sorrow of death. Rather it is the outward evidence of our fellowship, our communion with the living God, and our communion with Jesus the son through whom we have obtained eternal redemption.

With all of that, let's look more closely at,

II. JESUS AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

And the specific words, "This is my body" and "This is my blood."

I should note historically that though it was those words that defined the very definitive breach between the Roman Catholic Church and the protestant church of the 16th century reformation, it was also those words that divided the churches of the reformation, and from my human perspective, I find that unfortunate.

There were Protestants who reacted so strongly to the Roman idea that Jesus was literally, physically present in the elements of the Lord's Supper that they declared that he was actually not present at all. It was only a sign, a bare symbol, a simple memorial. We typically attribute that to the followers of Zwingli. The Lutherans, following Martin Luther, couldn't entirely rid themselves of the Roman notion of a physical presence of Jesus, but rather than agree with Rome that the bread and the wine itself is physically, carnally transformed into Jesus' body and blood, they express a view that his physical body is there, "in, with and under the elements." So it is a real, physical presence, but not actually in the bread and wine. I find that more than confusing.

It was John Calvin who best articulated the right idea that there is a spiritual presence of Jesus in those elements. It is a real presence, since the spiritual world is real! But that real presence is not physically connected with the flour of bread or the grapes of the wine. The real presence is established by the declaration of Jesus himself with his own words,

A. "This is my body."

He didn't change the bread. But he did set it apart in a most special way, that by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, there he is! In the bread, in spirit and in truth. It's real. And it is powerful. He

took that passover bread and said, “this is my body.”

Thus John could write those amazing words in,
John 6:48 “I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

Jesus continued,
John 6:52 “The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” 53 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

And Paul declares,
1 Cor. 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?”

So we eat his flesh! Not as cannibals. Not as those committing some sort of gross idolatry of a piece of bread. But in the reality of spiritual truth, that is what we do. We eat his flesh and drink his blood. “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My

flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.”

Real food. Spiritual food. Food indeed. For when I, ministering in Jesus’ name, give that bread to you, Jesus is declaring to you as he declared to his disciples, “This is my body.”

Briefly, you know the significance of his body, his body given unto death for your sins. It was in his body, in his human body, in his physical body, that the judgment and justice of your sins was satisfied. His body died, for your sins.

1 Peter 2:24 “[He] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Likewise his blood.

B. This is my blood.

The blood of the lamb was the blood of the Old Covenant. The blood of Jesus is the blood of the New Covenant. And we know the significance of blood.

Heb. 9:18 “Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. 19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.” 21 Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. 22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

And so we read,

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Eph. 1:7 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

Col. 1:13 “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

Heb. 9:13 “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

So Jesus says to us, in the communion and fellowship of this new covenant sacrament, “this is my blood.” And Peter would then emphasize this for our encouragement,

1 Peter 1:18 “...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

This is my body...This is my blood. And then notice what Jesus says next.

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He points us to heaven, he points us to the day yet future of his father’s kingdom, an obvious reference to the new heaven and the new earth, the eternal kingdom which shall be ushered in by

the glorious and triumphant return of Jesus at the end of this age. Thus the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is,

III. THE FORETASTE OF HEAVEN.

It marks,

A. The end of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

More perceptively, it ends the administration of the Old Covenant. It marks a completion to his duty to fulfill all righteousness, to submit to his father’s will. It marks the end of his suffering, his humiliation, and tells his disciples, and us, that there is another day coming. And even as they concluded by singing a hymn together, they looked forward to that coming day, even as we do every Lord’s Day now, every sabbath day we enjoy together.

And thus we live with,

B. The expectation of Jesus’ everlasting ministry.

Jesus is saying to us, with regard to this last passover and institution of the Lord’s Supper, he is saying to us, he will celebrate it with us again! But then, in that day, it will not be merely by faith, but by sight! Jesus’ presence will be full and complete. He won’t need a sacramental symbol or a sign, he won’t need a loaf of bread or a cup of wine. He will be there in person, in the flesh, we could even say. And so heaven is portrayed for us this way,

Rev. 19:1 “After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! 2 For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.” 3 Again they said, “Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!” 4 And

the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, “Amen! Alleluia!” 5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying, “Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!” 6 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 9 Then he said to me, “Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”

So that’s what we are looking forward to—the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Luke 14:15 “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

And beloved, on that great day, at that great wedding banquet, we shall be the bride!

Rev. 21:1 “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

That is the day to which you should look whenever you hear

those familiar words of the Lord’s Supper, and do so with delight as a bride would prepare herself for her wedding day. Until that day comes, we have those words for the great encouragement and hope of our souls. “Take, eat; this is My body.” And with the cup, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”