

Week 5: April 2

The Gospel around the Table

Written by **Brian Benoit**

Day 1 - The Gospel in Your Day

Read: Matthew 28:16-20

Tell me if any of these scenarios sound familiar:

You spend time every morning reading your Bible and praying before you go off to work. However, by the end of your workday, on the way out to your car, you can think of few (if any) moments where you thought of God, let alone talked about him.

You attend church every Sunday, and engage in worship, pay attention to the sermon, and really think about how you can apply it to your life. On the way home, you stop at the store to pick up a few things, and are annoyed by the way your fellow shoppers are acting, and how slowly the cashier is ringing everyone up. You might even sigh loudly and mutter to yourself to express your displeasure.

Small group this week was a wonderful experience where you felt seen, poured into, and your spiritual growth was evident. When you get home, your spouse, kids, or roommate does something that annoys you to no end – and you snap at them, letting them know exactly how you feel about their behavior.

Do any of these sound like you? You're not alone! It is common to compartmentalize our lives into "secular and sacred." We act one way at church, and another at work, and another at home. We confine God to our "quiet times" and Sunday morning. What, after all, does God have to do with my work? I'm not a pastor! I'm just [insert your job description here].

Unfortunately, viewing our lives like this leads us into a mode of faulty thinking that compartmentalizes them into areas that exclude the power of the gospel to change the world around us. In reality, our entire lives are meant to point others to Jesus. When we do our devotions in the morning, we are not just "setting aside time for God," but rather setting the tone for our day so that everything we do, every interaction we have, points another to Christ. Sunday morning isn't just to fill us up to "get me through the week," but it is to fill us up so that we can pour Christ into others.

Fluency requires immersion. Gospel fluency requires immersion. What does that look like? It looks like bringing the gospel – the good news of Jesus and his kingdom – into every aspect of our lives.

Questions to Consider:

What are some ways you compartmentalize your life into areas of “secular and sacred”?

What is something you can do to be more aware of where God is working around you – the places where the gospel of Jesus’ kingdom is pushing against the kingdom of the world?

What is one way you can demonstrate the gospel to someone you work with this week? Be specific.

(If you don’t work outside of home, you’re not off the hook! Instead, apply the question to someone you have regular contact with.)

Day 2 - The Gospel around Your Table

Read: Matthew 9:9-12

What do meal times look like in your house? Maybe they're rushed, as you try to fit some food in between activities. Or maybe everyone eats when they can. Perhaps you eat together, but the meal is either marked by silence or bickering. Or, maybe you are able to eat dinner together with everyone in the house most nights.

No matter what your meal times look like, here is another question: how do you incorporate the Gospel into your meal times?

I have to admit, that question feels like something of a head scratcher. Incorporate the Gospel into a meal time? What does that even look like?

Let's consider the ministry of Jesus, and the ways and times he preached the gospel of the kingdom of God come to earth. It seems like much of the time, his preaching took place going to, coming from, or sitting down to a meal. The sense of community we experience at meal times is something that we feel deep in ourselves. The act of sharing food with another person can be a powerful point of connection because we are sharing a pleasurable activity with them. Time spent eating with others also opens social connection as we are sitting together, looking at one another, and talking to one another during the meal.

As Jesus demonstrated for us, "around the table" is an ideal time to share the gospel.

Maybe you're like me, and you grew up in a Christian tradition where "sharing the gospel" was something you did on a street corner, or as a cold opening with a stranger, or even by leaving a tract in a public space, hoping that someone might pick it up. From this perspective, sharing the gospel around the dinner table seems odd. However, when we understand the gospel as the message of Jesus that the kingdom of God had come for healing and release from slavery to sin, and that the message culminated and was completed in Jesus' death and resurrection... well, we begin to see how talking about that story and how it is alive in our own lives is something we can share with others as we eat together. As we become more gospel fluent, we also begin to realize that this sharing of the gospel around the table is something we can do with anyone.

I want to encourage you this week to share a slow meal with someone, and share the gospel with them. It doesn't matter if they are "believers" or "unbelievers," the important thing is that you share the ways you see God working around you, in you, and for you in pursuit of bringing his kingdom more fully to the world. Here are some questions you could ask or answer that might be helpful to get you started on sharing the gospel around the table:

- What does God's provision of food show us about his character?
- What does "giving thanks for the food" mean in your home? Why do we give thanks?
- Where did you see God working today (or this week)?

- What are you grateful to God for today? It could be big or small, something obvious or something you take for granted most days.
- What do you hope God does in you in the coming years? Why do you hold that hope? How can God use that for his kingdom?

Questions to Consider:

How has God designed meals to be pictures of both necessary provision and multi-sensory joy? Which of those realities do you most easily lean toward as you consider food? Why? What's the danger in seeing food merely as one or the other?

How can the act of eating remind us of our need for Jesus, and how can it lead us to worship God?

What are some ways that you and your family and/or friends can view meals with greater intentionality? With what people should you eat regularly, how often, and why? What could that look like, and when will you start?

Day 3 - The Gospel as a Remembering

Read: Matthew 26:17-29

“On the night Jesus was betrayed, Jesus had the Passover meal with his disciples, which they did every year. Except this year, when Jesus took the bread and broke it, he said something strange...”

When Jesus instituted communion with his disciples, he was doing something wonderful and complex. He was taking an established holiday (Passover), and enhancing its meaning to show how, all along, this holiday was about the gospel. The gospel in the past, the present, and the future.

Past

For 400 years, the Jewish people had been slaves in Egypt. And then, seemingly out of nowhere, God came and rescued them from their slavery and oppression. He rescued them in spite of themselves, in spite of the fact that, after 400 years, they were just as Egyptian culturally as anyone else living in that country. Once slaves, now free. A ragtag bunch of people, now a “people group,” not because of anything they had done, but because of God’s great promise to Abraham. In the Passover meal, Jesus and the disciples were looking back at the great story arc of the Bible where God continues to love, continues to rescue, and continues to “be with” his people, in spite of who they are and what they do.

Present

But when he broke the bread, Jesus said something strange. “Take, eat. This is my body.”

When he passed the cup, Jesus said something strange. “This is my blood of the covenant which is being poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins.”

Jesus was not just looking back, but he was looking at the now – the present time where God *is* rushing in to rescue, where he *is* with his people. The God who loves, pursues, and rescues is not just a historical story, but a present fact right now, today through the person of Jesus. It is Jesus being with us and giving himself for us in the present.

Future

“But I say to you, I will not drink this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it with you new in my Father’s kingdom.” (Matthew 26:29)

In instituting communion, Jesus is not only turning our eyes to look back and at the present, but he also wants us to look forward. This is not the end of the story, and communion is a reminder of that! As we take communion, we should have an overwhelming sense of anticipation for that day we know is coming, where we will get to share the cup with Jesus *for the first time* in the fully realized kingdom of God. Do you feel that hope? It is similar to the anticipation of a bride and groom for their wedding day – which is why, I think, Jesus often used that picture in his parables. Can you imagine that day?

Jesus instituted communion so that we would **remember**, and so that we would remember **often**. Remember the past, the present, and the future of God's story in the world - the Gospel.

Questions to Consider:

Which of the three "rememberings" do you connect with the most today? Past, present, or future? Why?

What has been your understanding of and personal experience with "The Lord's Supper" or "communion"? If there is brokenness, misunderstanding, or even guilt or baggage associated with this, are there ways the gospel can become good news, even to that reality? In what ways can others help you through that?

Day 4 - Spiritual Practice

As you consider the ways you can immerse the Gospel into the rhythms of your life, I'd like to propose a simple practice that will incorporate the Gospel "around the table" for you.

Plan to celebrate communion in your home one time in the coming week. Do it just before you eat dinner, with whoever you live with. Everyone that lives in the house should be there, to remind us that Jesus has a seat at the table for everyone. If you live alone, I would encourage you to find someone to celebrate this with, either in their home or yours.

As you set the table for your communion dinner, include one extra cup with juice or wine to sit on the table as a way to remind you that Jesus promised us he would drink the cup with us for the first time in the Father's kingdom, but that that day has not yet come.

Before eating your meal, choose one of the following passages to read. As you come to the appropriate place in the story, break the bread, and take the cup together:

- Matthew 26:17-29
- Mark 14:12-25
- Luke 22:7-23

Ask someone at the table to pray, not only thanking Jesus for his life, death, and resurrection, but also for his provision of the food you are about to eat.

Then, as you eat the meal, discuss some of the following questions:

"The Gospel is the good news that the kingdom of God has come to earth. Jesus showed us through his life what that kingdom should look like, and ushered it in through his death and resurrection.

- What gospel story (story from Jesus' life) comes to mind for you right now?
- Can you tell us that story in your own words?
- Why do you think that story shows the 'good news'?
- What hope does it give you?
- How can you apply that gospel story to life today?"

You can also, if you wish, use the following questions from the Day 2 devotional this week:

- Where did you see God working today (or this week)?
- What are you grateful to God for today? It could be big or small, something obvious or something you take for granted most days.
- What do you hope God does in you in the coming years? Why do you hold that hope? How can God use that for his kingdom?

This is a practice that Jesus encouraged us to "do often." There is no set schedule for it, but the more we remember, the more gospel fluent we become.