

# A Place at the Table: Rediscovering the Wonder of the Lord's Supper (Part 1)

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>14</sup> And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. <sup>16</sup> For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." <sup>17</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. <sup>18</sup> For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. <sup>21</sup> But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. <sup>22</sup> For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" <sup>23</sup> And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this. (Luke 22:14–23)

### Central for Jesus

- A. In our text Jesus is taking the Passover meal of the Hebrew people and reframing it, as it were, leveraging its symbolism and things to institute something new, something we now refer to as the Lord's Supper—the bread and the wine, the body and the blood, the sacrament or ordinance of holy communion.
- B. Let me begin by making note of something significant here. We are now coming to the last remaining hours of Jesus' earthly life.
  - 1. By the end of the night, He'll be strung up and dragged before the Jewish high court, and they'll deliver Him over to Pilate, and by midday tomorrow He'll be on that cross, gasping for air, the weight of the world on His shoulders (literally!).
    - a. So what we're looking at here, when we see our text in its larger context, is essentially the last thing Jesus is going to do with His disciples, at least on this side of His resurrection.
- C. And the clear implication in this, of course, is that this meal, this whole Passover-Lord's Supper thing going on here is incredibly important to Jesus.
  - 1. Indeed, that's why He goes out of His way at the start of our text there in v. 15 to say: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."
    - a. The Greek underneath the English here accents just how strong this desire was. It's essentially the same two words piled up on top of each other: *epithumia epethumēsa* = lit. "with desire I have desired . . ."

- i. It's just a way of emphasizing: "If these are the last few hours I have on earth, this is where I want to be and this is what I want to be doing."

## Marginal for Us?

- A. And this is important for us to realize because the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, or whatever you call it, at least in evangelical circles, it can kind of get pushed into the margins.
  1. We aren't prone to see the importance of it, it seems like a lingering tradition from Bible times that's a bit outdated for us modern folks here today.
- B. And you know it hasn't always been this way.
  1. I heard one pastor say he went through some of the older school systematic theologies to see how much time and space was devoted to this subject, and there would be nearly 100 pages in some going back to Calvin and Turretin and others like this, but as we make our way into the modern era less and less would be devoted to the subject—you're lucky if you get 10 pages on it.
- C. And I think this also plays out even in the practice of modern evangelical churches:
  1. Some partake of it together as infrequently as once a year, others maybe once a quarter, some once a month, few are bold enough to add it to their liturgies every week (note: this is a strange season in our church, and due to COVID we've backed up on communion to once a month, but before this it would be an every week thing, and we'll look to get back to that as soon as we can).
- D. It used to be that when asked what are the marks of a true church, the proper understanding and administration of the Lord's Supper would be right there at the top of list.
  1. Now when someone thinks about what composes the church, we might think of a big building, a loud band, a skilled public speaker, uplifting messages, warm community, social action, or something like this.
- E. All this to say, we've got some learning to do here. This meal in Jesus' mind is of critical importance. And so it has been in the church of years gone by. And I want it to be such for us as well today.

## Two Sermons, Two Angles

- A. So I'll have two sermons on this, and with these we'll tackle the idea of the Lord's Supper from two angles: First, in this sermon, we'll look at what it means for Jesus in particular. And then we'll come back next time and consider what it means, or at least what it should mean, for us.
  1. So, then, beginning with Jesus, what is the Lord's Supper for Him? Three things: It's (1) Picture; (2) Promise; and (3) Plea.

## (1) Picture

### What's Come Before and What's Coming Next

- A. Now, by “Picture” here, I want us to understand, that for Jesus, this meal, as He’s enjoying it with His disciples in our text, is a picture both of what’s come before in Israel’s history with the Passover lamb and the Exodus from Egypt and things, and also of what’s coming in the next few days with His own brutal death on a cross and the ultimate redemption of God’s people Satan, sin, and grave.
  - 1. There’s rich symbolism here that directs one’s glance both backward and forward, both to the past and to the future.
    - a. To eat this meal, really, for Jesus, is to put one’s finger upon the golden thread of God’s plan of redemption that extends both back to the beginning of the story and on to the glorious end of it. But let me show you what I mean . . .

### Recalling the Passover

- A. The Passover celebration, you recall, continually celebrated by the Jewish people year after year, was God’s idea really, a way of keeping before His people all that He did for them when He first brought them out from slavery under Pharaoh and established them as His people.
- B. And you may remember, I hope, from my sermon a couple weeks ago, that God brought them out ultimately by bringing down judgment upon the Egyptians, where it all climaxed in the tenth plague and the killing of their firstborn sons.
  - 1. But the firstborn sons of Israel were spared, not because they were better, but because, in view God’s mercy, another died in their place—spotless lambs, sacrificed, the blood put over the door of their homes, and so the angel of death passed over them. And they were set free.
- C. And this Passover meal is a picture of that, a way of rehearsing and remembering, God’s redemption. And Jesus is here eager to celebrate it with His disciples.

### Walking through the Meal

- A. The typical Passover meal had four cups wine. Luke alone, in his depiction of the Last Supper, mentions two of these cups, the rest only one.
  - 1. The first one mentioned there in [v. 17](#) is likely the first cup of the feast. With this, the head of the family would take the cup and give thanks saying something like: “Blessed are you, Lord our God, eternal King, who have created the fruit of the vine.”
    - a. After this they would have likely recounted the reason why the day was celebrated retelling the Exodus story from [Deut 26:5–11](#).
    - b. Then they would have sipped from another cup of wine and sung [Psa 113](#), the first of what’s known as the Hallel Psalms ([Psa 113-118](#)).

- c. Then would come the meal, typically of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs.
- B. But here's what can't be missed: in the traditional Passover meal the head of the family would give an interpretation at each step in the celebration, especially with regard to the elements of the meal and things, where he'd explain what each element stood for.
  - 1. And Jesus, in our text, as host of this meal, as head of this spiritual family, will do the same but with a radical twist . . .

### Element #1: The Bread

- A. So we read, v. 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.'"
- 1. Well, that's different. Usually the father something like: "This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate when they came from Egypt."
    - a. But then here Jesus says: "No, no. This bread of affliction is Me. In just a few hours, I will be afflicted. This is My body here, broken and given for you."
- B. The Greek underneath what's translated as "for you" [Gk. *hyper humōn*] can have a vicarious sense, which might be better translated: "on your behalf," or "in your stead."
  - 1. It brings into view the notion of substitution—something akin to the Passover lamb—that Christ will be afflicted and broken so that we don't have to be.

### Element #2: The Cup

- A. But we move on in v. 20 to another cup of wine, likely now what would have been the third cup in the Passover meal, what's sometimes referred to as the "cup of redemption." And so we read: "And likewise [He took] the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"
- 1. Here again, He takes what was standard and gives it a gospel twist. Instead of merely giving thanks to God for the fruit of the vine He begins talking about His blood and a new covenant. (Now, this notion of a New Covenant we shall cover later under the idea of Promise, so for now I should only like to set our sights on this idea of His blood poured out for us.)
- B. It's a grim picture—drinking a cup full of the Savior's blood—but we get what He's saying. Much the same as this idea of His broken body being our food, so now we think of His blood being our drink.
  - 1. And the same understanding of substitution is hinted at. For again the Greek phrase shows up: "poured out for you" [Gk. *hyper humōn*]—"on your behalf," "in your stead." He will bleed so that we so that we don't have to. He gets death, we get life.

- a. The language here recalls Isaiah's famous prophecy from [Isa 53](#) concerning the Suffering Servant, where, in [v. 12](#), he speaks of one who will "[pour] out his soul to death and [who will be] numbered with the transgressors; [but not because He Himself is a transgressor, but because . . .] [He is bearing] the sin of many, and [is making] intercession for [them]."
- i. It's really the idea of the Passover Lamb again. The blood shed by an innocent One so that the guilty can be covered and set free.

### Element #3: The Lamb?!

- A. But, you know, I find it interesting that, in all of this talk of the meal and its elements and symbolism, Jesus never really does seem to point to the lamb itself. He points to the bread and wine, but what about the lamb? Isn't that the most poignant picture of all?
  - 1. Some commentators have even gone so far as to wonder whether there was actually a lamb eaten during this Last Supper meal at all. There's no explicit mention of a lamb anywhere—though perhaps it's implied in [v. 15](#) and the Greek word translated "[Passover](#)" there can refer to the Passover lamb in particular.
    - a. But in every gospel account, the matter is inconclusive at best.
- B. Whatever the case, the point seems to be that we don't need to concern ourselves with whether there is a lamb on the table or not because The Lamb is at the table.
  - 1. He is the point of all this. That's what is happening here. He's taking all the symbols of the Passover and giving them new and fuller meaning in Himself:
    - a. He's the bread of affliction, broken for us.
    - b. He's the cup of redemption, with blood poured out for us.
    - c. And, of course, as John the Baptist put it, He's "[the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world](#)" ([John 1:29](#)).
- C. He's what the Passover of old was picturing and pointing to. He's what the Lord's Supper that we now celebrate in our churches today is picturing and pointing to as well.
  - 1. Jesus is the new and greater Exodus . . . and the Mediator of a new and greater covenant. And it's to this idea of a New Covenant that I'd like to turn next . . .

## (2) Promise

### The New Covenant in My Blood

- A. The Lord's Supper for Jesus is not just Picture it is also Promise. So He speaks here of "[the new covenant in my blood](#)" ([v. 20](#)). It's a direct reference to the promise and prophecy of [Jer 31](#).

- B. But before we go there, we need to know something of what covenants are and how they were made in ancient times and in the Bible in particular.
1. A covenant is a promise bound with an oath whereby one party solemnly pledges to bless or serve another party in some specified way.
  2. The technical language used when speaking of making covenants is that people would “cut a covenant” [Heb. (*karat berit*)].
    - a. This terminology referred to these ritual sacrifices that often accompanied covenant making. They would cut an animal in two and sometimes the covenanting parties would walk together between the pieces of the animal symbolically saying in essence: “If I don’t keep my word here, let me be as this animal is.” In other words: “I will keep this vow on pain of death.” That’s the idea.
- C. And that’s why in the Bible we see references to what’s called the “blood of the covenant.”
1. So, in [Exo 24](#), God has brought Israel out from Egypt and led them to Sinai where He’s enter into covenant with them as His people. Moses goes up, God gives Him the Law, the Ten Commandments and things, Moses comes down relays it all the people of Israel and they all with one voice say: “[All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do](#)” (v. 3).
    - a. So Moses constructs an altar, and all these sacrifices are made on it, and then he throws some of the blood on the altar, symbolic I think of God Himself, and then we’re told in [v. 8](#) that he proceeds to throw the rest of the blood on the people saying: “[Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.](#)”
      - i. Now apart from this just being kind of gross and a big problem for when mama goes to do the laundry—not even those Tide laundry pods are going to get these bloodstains out—it’s also deeply meaningful. It’s saying: “Okay on pain of death, God is going to keep His side of the covenant and we’ll do the same.”
- D. But here’s the problem: we don’t.
1. It just takes a few chapters and these guys are breaking the first and greatest commandment, bowing down to a golden calf, another god. And the whole history of Israel is just one painful rerun of this failure to keep man’s side of the covenant.
- E. I mean it’s even happening right here around the table in our text, especially when we consider all the other gospel accounts of it.
1. Jesus is talking about a New Covenant and Peter and all the other disciples are going to try to go Old Covenant with it. We’re always so self-assured, so confident in our ability to get the job done, even though it flies in the face of all the evidence.

- a. So Jesus says, “You’re all going to fall away from me tonight, and Peter you’re going to deny me three times.” And Peter says: “No way Jesus. I won’t deny you, even if it means I have to die with You.” And all the disciples say the same.
    - i. But you catch what Peter’s doing there, don’t you? It’s Israel at the base of Sinai. “I got this. Let’s cut the covenant. I’ll stand firm in this even on pain of death.” But he doesn’t, none of them do. And none of us would either.
- F. And that’s why Jesus here speaks of “the new covenant in my blood” (v. 20). You see, Jesus has come not just to keep God’s side in the covenant, but ours as well. We deserve to die. We didn’t keep up our end of the deal. But He’ll die in our place and in so doing He’s going to open up the way for something new.
  - 1. Let’s go back to the text Jesus is referring to here in Jer 31 and I’ll show you what’s so new about it: “<sup>31</sup> 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, <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> 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” (vv. 31–34).
    - a. Let me show you four things that are new here . . .

## (1) New Record

- A. So God says through Jeremiah: “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34).
- B. The author of Hebrews in Heb 8-10, he just goes off on an extended reflection on Jer 31 and how the New Covenant is superior to what’s come before. And in Heb 10, he says: “<sup>1</sup> [S]ince the law [or the Old Covenant] has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. . . . <sup>3</sup> But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (vv. 1, 3-4).
  - 1. The old system reminded you of sin, but never really took it away. It was all to prepare you for and point you towards Jesus, who, when He’s offered for sin, it’s done, and there will be no remembrance of it in heaven. That’s what God says.
- C. Listen, some of us are just loaded down with guilt and shame. We almost hate ourselves. We see all the stuff we’ve screwed up, all the ways we’ve blown it, all the relationships we’re failing in, we stink at reading our Bibles, we’re struggling with the same sin we were last year, it doesn’t feel like we’re growing, we feel like spiritual losers and like no one, certainly not God, would accept us.

1. But here's the first piece of this New Covenant you've got to get: the first and fundamental gift of the gospel is a new record—you're free from all that guilt and all that shame.
  - a. You may remember all your sin, the devil may be hard at work to keep you focused there, but God's moved on. He's forgiven. He's wiped it clean. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).
- D. And let me be clear. By new record I don't mean a blank slate, like He just clears your record and now it's up to you to decide which way it's going to go from here. That's just to enter back under the burden of law and into bondage. You can't handle that and He doesn't give that. No.
  1. By new record I mean He gives you His record. Jesus, on that cross, He's taken all the curse and penalty for your sin—past, present, and future. And in place of that He gives you His record—perfect, unblemished, everlasting righteousness: 2 Cor 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."
    - a. You're not just blank. You're counted righteous, justified, in Jesus. His record with the Father is now yours! But there's more . . .

## (2) New Heart

- A. He also gives us a new heart. So God says through Jeremiah: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33).
  1. No longer is the law written by God on stone tablets out there somewhere. No. Now, in Christ, by the Spirit, He writes it right here.
- B. You know, we always try to identify the big problems with the world as something outside of us—it's the education system, the politicians, the access to guns, my mommy or daddy didn't show me enough love when I was growing up, that's why I'm this way. It's always outside.
  1. But God knows better. He knows fundamentally, the big problem isn't out there somewhere, it's in here. All this is the way that it is because of what's gone wrong in here.
    - a. That's the flow of the Biblical narrative. First sin and rebellion against God and then curse—broken relationships, broken environment, messed up emotional life, hatred, murder, illness, death.
- C. And here's the good news of the New Covenant, Jesus has come to give us a heart transplant! He's come to change us, not just externally, but inside—so we have a heart that's pure, that actually starts to love God and loves others.
  1. He gets inside, changes your affections. He doesn't just give you a new record, in some legal sense. He comes in and transforms you fundamentally, so that you start to live into that record, you start to grow in righteousness, because it's the way of truth and life. It's the way we were created to be in the first place.

## (3) New Relationship



- A. Did you notice this? [Jer 31:33-34](#): “<sup>33</sup> I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> 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.”
- B. At Sinai the Israelites were all left trembling at a distance, at the base of the mountain, while Moses and a select few got to proceed further. As this worked out, the priests could come near to God’s dwelling, but only at certain times and in certain ways.
  - 1. But in the New Covenant, all the walls have just come crashing down and everyone—the least and the greatest, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the clean and the filthy, the Jew and the Gentile—it doesn’t matter, you can come running in! Because of Christ and the cross! Because of the blood of the New Covenant.
- C. This is why the author of Hebrews goes on to encourage his readers in [Heb 10:19-22](#): “<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”
  - 1. It’s opened to you. I don’t care who you are, you can jump right up into the Father’s lap. The blood of Jesus has made a way! You can know God personally, intimately.

#### (4) New World

- A. And finally we see that, with this New Covenant, Jesus is really setting us on trajectory for a new world. For this, I’m looking at verses that come a little later down in [Jer 31, vv. 38-40](#), where God says: “<sup>38</sup> Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. <sup>39</sup> And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah. <sup>40</sup> The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the LORD. It shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever.”
  - 1. What’s He saying? It’s a picture of rebuilding and restoration. He’s talking about the New Jerusalem, the new heavens and new earth, the new world that’s coming in Jesus, the kingdom of God—where there will be no more death, no more sin, no more oppression, no more injustice, no more deception, no more sorrow, no more pain, no more letdowns, no more goodbyes.
    - a. It’s a place where as J.R.R. Tolkien writes, “everything sad [is] going to come untrue.”
- B. It’s the world that even as Jesus is around the table with His boys here, He keeps referring to. Did you catch that? That’s what He means when He says in [v. 18](#): “I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (cf. [v. 16](#)).
  - 1. He’s talking about the world, the kingdom, that He’s bringing in, that’s coming in the end. This is where it’s all going.

- a. And the Lord's Supper, while it still is a picture of the Passover and Exodus, and a picture of our Lord's body broken and blood shed, it is also a picture of this great heavenly banquet, the "[marriage supper of the Lamb](#)" as John calls it in Revelation ([Rev. 19:9](#)). And, as such, it keeps us anticipating and hoping and it assures us that that day is coming soon.
- C. Isn't this what we're all longing for—acutely right now? My goodness, coming off a week like this one, with all that went down on capitol hill—stuff shaking at the very foundation of our country, threatening to crack and just rip apart.
  1. Don't you long for a world where there's peace, where we're no longer talking about war and violence and drawing lines and pulling guns and things? Listen to me, that's what Jesus has come to establish, that's where Jesus is taking us!
- D. But the crazy thing is the way He's goes about getting us there, right? It's not first by sword and violence and might—that's how we might think He'd do it—but it's by love, and self-sacrifice, by pouring Himself out to death for us, for His enemies.
  1. I mean think about it, the text we have in front of us this morning, it's surrounded by scandal. Right before it we learn about Judas' move to betray Jesus. Right after it we learn about Peter's tragic denial of Jesus, in the other gospels we're told that every disciples is going to fall away and abandon Him in the end.
    - i. It's just scandal and heartbreak and division and things.
- E. And yet what does Jesus do?
  1. He doesn't get self-defensive, or sulky, or angry. He doesn't throw a fit or a fist.
  2. He throws a party. He hosts a meal. He invites these guys to come take a seat at the table, and in the very center table are all these things that symbolize the way He's going to lay His life down in love for them.
    - a. That's how He's going to change the world. That's how this whole thing gets started.
      - i. And that's the sort of heart that followers of King Jesus ought to have for everyone regardless of what side of the political divide the person is on.
- F. Now, hear me, I'm not a Christian pacifist, I'm not saying there's not a time to stand up against evil and oppression and things and maybe even go to war—after all, Jesus is going to come in with the sword at the end—I'm just saying this is where it starts and this is the heart we have through it all.
  1. Love—self-sacrificial, humble, heart-broken, love, even for, especially for our enemies.
    - a. Judas is at the table. Let that sink in. In fact, that's where I want to close . . .

### (3) Plea

#### A Last Courtesy

- A. Look at vv. 21-23 of our text again: “<sup>21</sup> ‘But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. <sup>22</sup> For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!’ <sup>23</sup> And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.”
- B. And now here’s what I want you to see: Jesus doesn’t explicitly call out Judas here does He? He speaks in sort of a veiled and cryptic way, and so the disciples are all left wondering who it could be who would betray Him.
  - 1. Now, Jesus could have called Judas out clearly, explicitly. He does this elsewhere with other guys—He calls Herod a fox (Luke 13:32), and some of the Jews He calls sons of the devil (John 8:44).
- C. So why not be explicit here?
  - 1. Well, I’ll tell you why. I agree with (I think it was) D.A. Carson when He says this is what we could call Jesus’ “last courtesy” to Judas. He’s refusing to out him, to shame Him. He’s letting him know He knows what he’s planning, without fully exposing him. He’s giving him one last chance to change his mind.
    - a. In other words, it’s almost as if He’s pleading with His betrayer to come to the table, to take and eat, this time for real.
- D. And I think that’s what this meal is for all of us really. It’s a plea from our Savior, to come, to receive His welcome, to take and eat, to feast on Him by faith.
  - 1. Listen, He knows what some of you are scheming, where you may be compromising with sin, playing games with the devil, whatever.
    - a. But the invitation still stands, there’s a place for you at this table. Let go of the silver, let go of the sin, come take up something far better, the bread and the wine, the body and the blood of Jesus, broken for you, poured out for you. What are you waiting for?!
- E. Here now you get why this meal is so important to Jesus, why He so badly desired to eat it with His disciples, and why He wants His church to keep eating it in remembrance of Him.
  - 1. It’s His way of calling you back in, of showing us His commitment to welcome us—it confronts us in our sin and surprises us with grace, at one and the same time!