

The Lord's Supper

The passage covers three separate topics, but I will focus on the Lord's supper.

I want to lead up this message by recounting events that occurred while I was visiting my daughter and swinging Oslo (my 3-year-old grandson) in a swing for hours. It takes a very long time for him to get bored from swinging, and he's quite interesting to listen to him talk, nearly non-stop. At one point, he was adding numbers and doing exceptionally well, then he got to $20 + 2$ and stated that it was equal to 5. I inquired as to who taught him that. He said, daddy. Then I asked him who was the smartest, mommy or daddy, to which he responded, understandably, mommy. I then told him that $20 + 2$ was 22. He then replied, "If you say so". I wasn't expecting that response, at least not from a 3-year-old. In this message, I will be providing several pieces of information that border on speculation, and I'll identify them as such, so feel free to tell me "if you say so."

Communion, breaking of bread, Eucharist, and the Lord's Supper can all be used interchangeably. Eucharist is derived from a Greek word meaning thanksgiving. In the Passover, the Israelites thank God for their deliverance from Egyptian slavery. In the Eucharist, we thank God for our delivery from the slavery of sin. "Breaking of bread" is used mainly by churches with Brethren assembly or church roots. The term Eucharist is used primarily by Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Lutherans, usually those with a strong liturgical service. Nearly all denominations use the term communion. And the term "the Lord's Supper" I haven't seen used by most except by reference. In this message, I haven't intentionally preferred one expression over another.

The Last Supper

Mark 14:12-26

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?"

And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us."

So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.

In the evening He came with the twelve. Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me."

And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?"

He answered and said to them, “It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born.”

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”

Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

What Was The Passover Meal?

The Jews would celebrate every year a memorial, which is a celebration and a ritual to commemorate their release from Egyptian captivity.

Jacob, also known as Israel, from which all of the Jews were descendants, had gone to Egypt due to a famine in the land of Canaan. They were under the protection of Joseph, one of Israel’s sons. As you may recall, Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers, but he rose in prosperity and a high position within Egypt. As in many things in life, God turned a sorrowful situation, his being sold into slavery, into a blessing, he saved his family from famine. The Israelites flourished in Egypt as God blessed them.

Exodus 1:8-11 Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. He said to his people, “Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don’t, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country.” So, the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves.

The Exodus tells us about the ten chances that God gave Pharaoh, the Egyptian ruler, to let the Israelites leave Egypt. When he would refuse, God would judge Egypt with a plague. He refused ten times, and as a result, there were ten plagues.

Before the last plague, the death of the firstborn, the Israelites were to follow a ritual that they were commanded to perform every year thereafter. The Passover feast and unleavened bread feast are described in **Exodus** 12:1-28.

For seven days after Passover, they would celebrate the feast of unleavened bread, representing the haste in leaving. There was no time to wait for bread to rise as they fled Egypt.

This ritual involved sacrificing a one-year-old male lamb with no defects. Then, they were to smear the blood of the lamb on the doorposts. The tenth plague consisted of the angel of death killing the firstborn of every household that didn’t have blood on their doorposts. It passed over

the households that had blood on their doorposts and that is where the Passover name comes from.

The preparations were to be done in haste, eating the supper already dressed, ready to leave quickly. They ate the roasted sacrificed lamb, burning any leftovers, ate unleavened bread, representing the haste in preparing it, and bitter herbs, representing the bitter years they served as slaves.

Passover foreshadowed Christ as the sacrificed spotless lamb of God. Jesus is our Exodus. He delivers us from slavery to sin through his death.

Passover has some other relevant elements that help us understand the Last Supper that Jesus instituted for us to do in remembrance of him.

Some of our understandings of the Last Supper come from a Western bias or interpretation without understanding Eastern or Jewish customs. Jesus was not only a Jew but an observant Jew. He followed and observed the Jewish customs, including their feasts. Therefore, some understanding of these customs can help us get a better appreciation of the spiritual truths we read in the Bible.

Leonardo da Vinci's rendition of The Last Supper is moving and very well known. Leonardo was a genius and artist, but this painting contained many inaccurate Western biases. It's still a wonderful piece of art and inspiring nonetheless. But it demonstrates how we project our Western customs onto an Eastern event.

Here are some errors in the painting:

- The table is wrong. It wouldn't have been a raised table as we use but a triclinium. A triclinium consisted of three low tables arranged in a U with couches or cushions around it. The guests would lie down sideways around it, reclining on their left elbow and eating with their right hand. They would be served from the middle. Here are some examples of tricliniums. In Luke 7:36-50 it tells the story of the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair while Jesus was having a meal at the home of Simon the Pharisee. It is easier to comprehend how this could take place when we understand how people are reclining around a triclinium, with their feet outward hanging away from them. She wouldn't have needed to be under the table to wash Jesus' feet, but in the case of Leonardo's painting that would have been required! Awkward to say the least.

In this slide, we see what many scholars think were the likely positions of some of the disciples based on other New Testament texts, like the Gospel of John. It is speculation but based on key Bible texts.

Matthew 20:26-27 and Luke 14:7-10 teach about seeking the lowly place at a feast. It appears from John 13:1-17 that Peter may have been the last one to have his feet washed, which would put Peter at the end of the table, the lowest position. Also, when Peter catches John's attention and motions him to inquire with Jesus as to who the betrayer is, in John 13:24, it would be

easiest for him to do so if he was seated directly across from John, especially since John would have been facing away from all the other positions.

John, leaning on his left arm, leaned back on Jesus' bosom (John 13:23), and therefore he would have been on the right of Jesus.

As for Judas, in Mark 14:18-20, he indicates that the one who will betray him is the one who shares a bowl with Jesus. In John 13:26, Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Most likely, Judas was next to Jesus. Jesus showed his love to Judas by giving him this honored position, even knowing that Judas would betray him.

There are many good websites explaining the likely positions of the disciples around the table, and they all seem to agree.

- Jesus wouldn't have been in the center, but more likely, as displayed in this last picture at the top of the start of the U. The host would have the guest of honour (Judas) on his left and his most trusted friend on his right (John). The servant or lowest position was at the far end of the U, closest to the door (Peter). I would like to remind you that the seating arrangement is all speculation, but it is believable and helps understand some of the dynamics between the disciples and Jesus.
- As indicated earlier, they wouldn't be sitting in chairs but reclining
- There are eels and orange slices instead of lamb. The eels have been identified in recent years after some restoration work was done to the painting.
- There are Italian dinner rolls vs unleavened flatbread
- They're wearing sandals at the table, which would have been considered ill-mannered.
- Such a large fine white cloth for a table covering would likely be very hard to obtain.
- Notice the daylight through the window. Passover would have started after sunset.
- The landscape through the window isn't that of Jerusalem but more of an Italian rolling hills countryside.
- It would have been unlikely to have anything but one door to the upper room as that would have been an extremely large, uncommon room. The painting shows at least six doors.

Artists can take artistic liberties, but was Leonardo da Vinci even aware of his Western bias? Until very recently, Christianity distanced itself from its Jewish roots. Even Martin Luther was anti-Semitic. The fact that Jesus was Jewish was an inconvenient truth not to be explored.

The Roman Catholic church holds that there are seven sacraments. Protestants, which our church identifies with, believe that only baptism (Matthew 28:18-20) and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29) are valid sacraments because Jesus himself instituted them. Catholics believe the remaining five were implicitly instituted.

There is at least one mainstream protestant denomination that doesn't practice any sacraments but is not in opposition to it. There are historical reasons as to why it came to be that way, and we have to be careful not to judge their position. They view the true communion sacrament as

that spiritual joy and fellowship Christians share every time they gather together for a meal and remember Jesus in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and other protestant denominations have different views on the bread and the wine. This would only be a distraction to this message, so I won't discuss these, but there is much good material online about this topic.

The Passover looked both backward and forward. Even while in their own land, the Israelites, with the Romans as rulers, still longed for deliverance. They have often been captive throughout the centuries, including when they were taken to Babylon after the fall of the Jewish dynasties and, more recently, during the Holocaust. When Passover is celebrated, it is as if they were present at the Exodus. They celebrated past, present, and future deliverance by God. This is critical to our understanding of how we're to celebrate communion.

Past

Looking backward, as if we are currently present at this last supper. We relive in our minds and spirits what he did on the cross, shedding his blood as the Passover lamb for the sins of the world. I want to stress that we're not re-sacrificing Jesus. Jesus sacrificed himself once and for all. There is no need for him to be sacrificed again. However, we can relive that past moment in a very real and present way. God gave us the ability to relive and understand the past by putting ourselves in that moment and thinking of what it must have been like. The communion rites are like signposts to help us be in that moment. They help us not forget what Jesus did for us.

Present

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n the present, Jesus is actually present and communing with us, and we're acknowledging our redemptions through him. However, communion isn't only about intellectual assent but also about experiencing his presence and the emotions that flow out of this. God has made us emotional beings so that our worship of Him would be full of it. Our gratitude for his work on the cross is empty if it is empty of emotions. Note that the communion rite is called the Lord's Supper, not the "Brethren's Supper" or whatever other denomination. The communion is that of all the saints, all of the denominations. We are not the host; Jesus Christ is the host. When we gather for communion, we're also acknowledging our unity with the broader church, those in China, all over the world, and all denominations in spite of whatever differences we may have. I have been guilty of being shocked when I discover someone with true faith in Jesus that is part of denomination X. God has worked in my life in this respect, and I thank him for opening my eyes to the beautiful faith of others and my own prejudices.

There is a distinction between the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the Eucharist. The proclamation is mainly through words to the ears of the world and the Eucharist is mostly a visible demonstration of the gospel, an eyewitness of the mystery of the gospel.

Future

And looking to the future – when the Marriage Supper of the Lamb Rev 19:9 will be celebrated. 1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

All of Christ's enemies will be vanquished. There will be a new heaven and earth. Sin will no longer be, and we'll experience the full manifestation of Christ for eternity.

We're encouraged that the battle isn't over. Jesus' victory over the whole world is coming. Some also like to think of it in these terms: Christ has died (past), Christ is risen (present), and Christ will come again (future)

During the supper, there is a point where the Jews would pronounce a thanksgiving "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth." This is what likely occurred when Matthew 26:26 tells us "when he had given thanks." After this, they would say, "This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate." (Deuteronomy 16:3), representing their suffering in Egypt. At this point, Jesus says something different and shocking, "Take it, for this is my body." He identifies himself with the bread to be broken, that he was to be killed, and that his body would be given up in sacrifice. By eating this bread, the disciples would benefit from Jesus' sacrifice, just as the Israelites benefited from the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Jesus was saying, "I am this broken bread.", "There is a new Passover and Exodus.", "My death will redeem your lives."

Another connection with Exodus is the manna in the desert.

John 6:32-33, 35, 48-51

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."... Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ... Yes, I am the bread of life! Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh."

Jesus is the new manna from heaven.

Another Middle Eastern custom was to be reconciled by sharing a meal. They would share a piece of bread torn in two, with each one eating one half of the bread, one going into your body and one going into my body. By eating the same bread, we are now one and reconciled. God says, "Here is my Son, take Him and eat Him, and if you do, we shall be reconciled and be one." As we share communion together, we are one. Note that when Jesus, at the end of his ministry, prayed for his followers, present and future ones, he requested three times for the unity of the believers (**John** 17:11, 17:20-22)

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:

This was paramount to Jesus and should be paramount to us as his followers.

Another possible allusion to Jesus being the manna, in Matthew 6:11, when Jesus is teaching us how to pray in the Lord's prayer, we're to ask God "to give us today our daily bread." Could this daily bread request be for more than physical sustenance but also for spiritual sustenance by Christ, the manna from heaven? The manna in Exodus was a daily bread provided by God.

There are more connections to the Old Testament related to the bread, such as the temple's Bread of the Presence, Melchizedek, and others that time doesn't permit us to explore.

But I will briefly tease you with this comparison table between the Bread of the Presence and the Last Supper, which is like dipping the tip of your toe in the water.

As for the cup, in Exodus 24, Moses affirms Israel's covenant with God.

Exodus 24:3-8 So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. ... Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. ... And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words."

A lot of the Old Testament is quite bloody—especially the sprinkling of the blood on the people. The blood that accompanied worship and atonement wasn't what we would call seeker-sensitive. Sin and its forgiveness is a bloody business.

Hebrews 9:22 says, "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

In Mark 14:24 Jesus said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many." This is a direct allusion to the covenant initiation at Sinai by Moses. This was a fulfillment of that future renewal of the covenantal relationship with YHWH. It is also an allusion to Zechariah 9:11 "As for you also, Because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

The good news is that Jesus was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. There is no longer any need for any more atonement sacrifices.

There are four cups of wine for Passover. The following are somewhat speculative as it assumes that the customs written in the Mishnah were present at the time of Jesus. The Mishnah is a written collection of the Jewish oral traditions compiled around the second century. Scholars have studied parallels between the traditions in the Mishnah and the Last Supper found in the Gospels and have been able to produce a plausible reconstruction of the Passover at the time of Jesus.

The first cup was the cup of sanctification. A blessing would be given over this cup before the food was brought.

Then the second cup of wine would be mixed but not drunk. It was the cup of proclamation where what the Lord had done for Israel to set them free from Egypt would be proclaimed.

The Passover participants would give thanks by singing Psalms 113–114. These two psalms, along with Psalms 115–118, were known as the Hallel Psalms, psalms of “praise” (Hebrew *hallel*), which would be sung over the course of the entire meal. They progress from plight to praise, from enslavement to deliverance or Exodus.

The third cup, known as the cup of blessing, would signal the beginning of the supper. Customs vary for this cup, but after the meal, the cup would be blessed and then drunk, signaling that the supper was complete.

The remaining Hallel Psalms 115-118 would be sung.

After the singing of Psalm 118, the fourth cup of wine, known as the cup of praise, would be drunk. The Passover meal was complete once this last cup was drunk.

Mark 14:26 indicates that after they sang the last Psalm, likely the Great Hallel (Psalm 118), they headed out to the Mount of Olives without drinking the final Passover cup, the fourth cup.

In John 19:28-30 at the cross ... Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, “I thirst!” Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!”

Three times in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to be spared from the cup of wrath. Jesus did drink the fourth cup and concluded the Passover meal when he drank the sour wine on the cross, receiving the cup of wrath, proclaiming, “It is finished.” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

Today we’ve explored the significance of the Lord’s supper:

- Jesus the Lamb of God who reconciled us to God
- The unity and communion of the saints
- The communion looks to the past, present and future.
- First-century Jewish customs are relevant
 - However some words of caution are required:
 - It’s important to always apply discernment when claims are made, as what can appear to be truth can actually be misleading.
 - There are many out there seeking a willing ear, promoting new truths that are falsehoods. Sensationalism can be entertaining but not necessarily truth.
 - Finally we can get so wrapped up in first-century customs that we miss truths that apply across all time and dismiss some truths as only applying to the first-century.
- The New Testament is a continuation of the Old Testament vs a replacement of it.
 - It is its fulfillment, more accurately, Jesus is its fulfillment.

I hope that you've seen how both the Jewish customs and the Old Testament help us get a better spiritual understanding of the Bible as a whole.

I pray that if some of you here today haven't trusted Jesus as your saviour, that you will examine what he has done for us and turn your life over to him. Though we may not be worthy of his love, he loves us so much that he died for us. He is good and loving and worthy of our adoration and love. In communion, we express our gratefulness and reflect his love back to him as one body.