

The significance of the Lord's Supper

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The Lord Jesus Christ passed down two ordinances to the church that were to be observed until He returned. The first, Baptism, was seen at the beginning of Christ's ministry. The second church ordinance is the Lord's Supper that came at the end of Christ's earthly ministry. As we turn our attention towards the Lord's Supper, to get a fuller understanding we have to go all the way back to the earliest parts of the Bible.

In Genesis 2:25 we find this phrase: *"The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."* In the beginning, Adam and Eve had perfect relations with God and with each other. There was no abuse, sin, lust, guilt, or any reason to hide. They were naked but felt no shame.

All of this changed in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve rebelled against God, and their first actions recorded in scripture after their sin was to hide. Their innocence was lost, and shame and guilt now became a part of their lives. They tried to cover themselves with leaves, but it was not sufficient to cover their sin and shame. In Genesis 3:21 it says this, *"The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."*

In this verse there was holy God, sinful man, and one other. It was the animal that was killed so that garments of skin could be made to cover the guilt and the shame of Adam and Eve. It was the first time we see an **"innocent other"** who gives his life to cover the sin of another.

In Exodus 12 this idea of the **"innocent other"** continues. It tells us of how the Hebrews, the descendants of Abraham, had been slaves in Egypt for generations. Moses, speaking for God, commanded Pharaoh to release God's people, but Pharaoh refused time and time again. God brought plagues against the Egyptians and against their false gods, but Pharaoh refused to obey and let the Hebrews go free. As the final judgment, God brought a plague of death that killed every firstborn son in Egypt. In the night when death came over Egypt, **God called the Hebrews to put the blood of a male lamb without imperfections and with no broken bones, over the doorframes of their homes. By this blood of an innocent lamb they were protected and the death passed over their homes.** Once again, an **"innocent other"**, a lamb, was sacrificed to save the life of God's people.

Because of this event the Jews were instructed to observe Passover each year to remember what God had done for them. In Exodus 12 the Jews were commanded to, ***“Obey these instructions (of the Passover meal) as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.”*** It was to be a way of passing down to generations to come a testimony to the greatness of their God. It was an annual meal that spoke of God’s deliverance from the past, but also God’s ultimate deliverance in the future.

It was during a sacred Passover meal, on this reverent night of the year, that the Last Supper occurred. It was a simple upper room, a group of ordinary men, in a small country, but it would change the world forever. The Messiah, the Christ, the Deliverer had finally come, but not just for the Jews. He had come for people of every nation. They would observe the Passover meal as had been done thousands of times before, but this time would be different. It was no longer to celebrate the past and the future. It would now be a statement about the present. The Christ Himself would participate in the meal and fulfill the messianic prophecies this very night. Jesus was the Passover lamb, come to take away the sins of the world.

Though the meal had several different elements, God chose to use only two to be used for the Lord’s Supper. The bread of the Passover meal was seen as the “bread of affliction” which was eaten by the enslaved Jews back in Egypt. As one partook of the bread in the Passover meal of Jesus’ day, their minds were to be taken back to the suffering that was endured by the Jews who had been enslaved in Egypt, remembering the night God had delivered them. The “bread of affliction” and God’s deliverance come together in Christ. His body was broken for us so that we could be saved.

Isaiah the prophet wrote about it this way:

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is our daily bread. He is our manna from heaven. He is everything that we need. In John 6 we see a story where Jesus feeds five thousand people with just five barley loaves and two fish. The people are so amazed that they continue to follow Jesus. But Jesus knew their hearts. He knew that they were following Him for the wrong reasons.

When they had received the food from Jesus they could have chosen to bow before Him as Savior, Lord, and Messiah, but instead they thought to make Him king so He could liberate them from the Romans. Instead of basking in the presence of the Messiah, they saw an opportunity to use Him to get what they wanted. It was the selfish pattern of their lives. They were not true followers of Christ. They were followers of self. Jesus confronted them declaring Himself to be the Bread of Life. They were not to pursue Christ’s gifts, but Christ Himself. We must guard our hearts against doing the same. As we eat this bread may we be reminded of the affliction, the deliverance, and the provision of our Savior, our Bread of Life, and may it drive us to worship and away from selfishness.

In John 6 we find these verses:

***“³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. . . ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” “Truly, truly, 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 feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on 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 whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”*”**

Jesus made a very disturbing statement. Eat my flesh and drink my blood. For our “civilized” ears this is at first offensive. Jesus is merely making a very simple analogy. If I am the bread of life, then through faith take me in, ingest me, consume me, take all of me that you can, feast on me, rely on me to be your strength and your provision as your daily sustenance, as your source of life. We cannot just acknowledge Christ as Lord with our mouths or a loud “amen”. There is a point at which we must apply Him to our lives by fully putting our trust in Him.

In the words of Douglas Wilson: You cannot address your hunger by looking at pictures of food. You cannot hear music by staring at a page of notation. You cannot quench your thirst by thinking about the idea of water. No, in all such things you must come to the point of application.¹

The wine during the Lord’s Supper was a symbol of Christ’s blood that was shed on the cross for us. Blood was chosen by God to be the symbol of life itself. In Leviticus 17:11 it says, ***“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”*** In Hebrews 9:22 we are told that ***“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.”*** That was the reason for the ***“innocent other”*** and the Passover lamb. Christ shed His blood so that we could be forgiven and gain eternal life. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament were rituals that pointed to the true sacrifice that was still to come in Christ. They were temporary in effect and had to be repeated over and over again. Sin against an infinite and holy God demanded an infinite and holy sacrifice. When Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, died, the full wrath of God was satisfied. Jesus Christ was truly the eternal ***“Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world”*** (John 1:29). Similar to the lamb’s blood at Passover, it was the shed blood of Christ that covered the guilt of man and protects man from the judgment of God. No other sacrifice will ever be required.

¹ <http://exploringfortruth.blogspot.com.es/2012/08/lords-supper-devotion-remembering.html#.Wsvn8YhubIU>, read April 13, 2018.

The blood of Christ did not only bring forgiveness and reconciliation with God. It brings daily blessing to our lives. It gives us power to overcome the evil one (Revelation 12:11). We can now come near to God (Ephesians 2:13). We are freed from a guilty conscience (Hebrews 10:22). May we share in the Lord's Supper remembering our Savior who has drawn near and reconciled us to Himself.

The Lord's Supper is a "remembrance" of what Christ did for us to save us from our sinfulness. That must not be forgotten. We, the imperfect ones, are invited to sit at His table. It is grace for those who sin. So come to His table. At the same moment we must not forget that even our initial coming to Christ was made available only on His terms, not on our own. There must be a repentant heart. There must be a faith that draws us near.

This eating and drinking at the Lord's Supper table is not only individual, there is also a corporate sense to it as well. Sitting at a table and eating with others always has a corporate purpose to it. You share food. You share conversation. There is a sense of shared experience. Even throughout scripture you also see this sense of fellowship as people ate together. As we join in the Lord's Supper we are not sitting in this room alone. We are sitting side-by-side with Christian brothers and sisters who are also remembering the body and the blood of Christ. We are gathered together in this place bound not by where we are from or what language we speak, but united in the fact that we have the same Father.

Because of this, there is no room at the table for division or problems amongst brothers and sisters when we observe the Lord's Supper. Paul speaks of it directly in 1 Corinthians 11:

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul is writing to those in the church in Corinth in regards to how they had abused the Lord's Supper. In their day it seems to have been accompanied by a larger meal, or at least more than just a small portion of bread and juice like we do it. Paul states in 1 Cor. 11:20-21, ***²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.***

Some of the Corinthians were using the Lord's Supper event to selfishly fulfill their desires and thus cause division. They were not thinking of others. They were mocking the whole purpose of the event for their own sake. This should not be true amongst us. We should examine our hearts to see if we are observing the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner in keeping with the character of Christ.

At IBC we observe the Lord's Supper every third Sunday. May I encourage you to take time on the eve of every third Sunday to examine your heart before you come to observe the Lord's Supper? Starting with these words of Paul may we first examine our walk with Christ for any sinful discrepancy in our faith or unconfessed sin. May we specifically search our heart to see if we are the source of any division between ourselves and another brother or sister in Christ. Then may our prayers echo Psalm 139:23-24, ***"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"***

As I close this focus on the Lord's Supper I would like us to turn our attention towards 2 Samuel 9. In this chapter one finds a story of a man named Mephibosheth. He was the grandson of Israel's former king, King Saul. One day he was summoned to the palace by King David, Israel's present king. In this time in history it was a normal practice to kill all descendants of the former king so there would be no uprising, claiming a descendant of a former king as the rightful heir to the throne.

This must have been the expectation of Mephibosheth when summoned. To make matters worse, when King Saul had been killed in battle years before, Mephibosheth's father, prince Jonathan, had also been killed. On that day Mephibosheth had been a young child. In the chaos and fear of that day Mephibosheth's personal attendant had dropped him and he had been injured. Because of this he had spent the rest of his years disabled and unable to walk. In their culture the lame had no status and no rights.

With this on his mind Mephibosheth made his way to King David's palace. On arrival Mephibosheth bowed on the floor before King David and said these words, *"What is your servant, that you should regard a dead dog like me?"* (2 Samuel 9:8)

In an unexpected response King David said, *"Do not fear, for I will surely show kindness to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, and will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul; and you shall eat at my table regularly."* (2 Samuel 9:7)

It was amazing that one who many would have considered an enemy of the king and a grandson of King Saul, who had time and again tried to kill King David, would be treated with such grace. But is our situation any less unbelievable? Were we not the enemies of God, caught up in rebellion, dead in the spirit, wicked and restless, with our allegiance given to the kingdom of this world? But yet here we are, in the midst of our sinfulness, brokenness, submission and faith. Invited to once again sit in the presence of God and observe the Lord's Supper. Reveling in His body and His blood that was shed so that we could be made children of God.

Welcome to the banquet table of the King. Feast on Him, the Bread of Life. Taste and see that He is good.