The First Lord's Supper

Eternity's Table

Week 2

11.1.26

Last meals are a touchy subject.

Between a failed execution several weeks ago in Tennessee and the debate over the public execution of a domestic terrorist, execution and last meals are not uncommon topics in America.

It is a sad fact of human history that executions and death penalties have long been considered necessary for the maintenance of rule and government.

Whatever you may believe concerning the death penalty, it was this terrible act that frames the most powerful meal of human history.

> Matthew 26:26–30 (CSB)
>
> **THE FIRST LORD'S SUPPER**
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> 26 As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take and eat it; this is my body." 27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and said, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 But I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." 30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Some call this story, "the Last Supper."

A. I like the heading in my Bible: "The First Lord's Supper."

1. For many of us, this story is so familiar we can't imagine a world without it.

2. It's like Fireworks on the 4th of July:

3. We may not remember or know what it means, but we can't imagine a 4th of July without it.

B. Maybe that is how we would describe the Lord's Supper (also called communion).

1. We don't know what it means, but we can't imagine church without it.

2. Some churches host it weekly, for good reason.

3. Some do it once a month or a couple of times a year, also for good reason.

4. Some use real wine, for good reason.

5. We use grape juice, for good reason, unless it sits in the box too long; then it becomes the real stuff.

C. There are two acts that Jesus told the Church to do: ordinances.

1. Water Baptism

2. The Lord's Supper (communion).

3. Although water baptism and communion are celebrated differently in different churches and in different parts of the world, all Christian churches do these two things.

4. When a person surrenders their life to Jesus, we baptize them in water.

5. When a person receives Communion, we remember how Jesus surrendered His life for us.

The story of the First Lord's Supper feels like the linchpin of history.

A. This meal that Jesus shared ties all of the past to all of the future.

1. The Cross, the empty grave, the Ascension, all come after this moment.

2. Before this night is the story of redemption: The deliverance from the evil of Egypt, the blood of lambs smeared on doorposts by faith, causing the destroying angel to PASSOVER the house.

3. Later, the Passover meal celebrated their freedom from slavery and their hope of the coming of the Messiah.

B. Today, the Jewish people remember Passover, with the expectation that the Messiah (whom we believe has already come) will come that night.

1. In a Jewish household, you will likely find an empty chair, and in front of it a plate and a glass of wine or grape juice, in anticipation that the prophet Elijah will arrive and announce the Messiah's arrival.

2. We believe the Messiah is coming again, but not for the first time but for the Second time.

C. For the Christian, the meaning of Passover is different.

1. Today, I want to highlight this passage.

2. If it is the first time you've ever looked into it, congratulations! I think this is one of the greatest parts of Christianity. My hope is to not mess it up for you.

3. If you've been around this for a while, I hope you walk away with a deeper and more wonderful understanding.

a. Just as a veteran looks at fireworks differently than a civilian, a believer should look at the bread and the cup differently than a non-believer or a new believer.

b. This morning, I don't want to challenge your perspective on the Lord's Supper as much as I want to broaden and deepen it.

We opened with Matthew's Gospel, but let me now read from Luke.

Luke 22:14–23 (CSB)

THE FIRST LORD'S SUPPER

14 When the hour came, he reclined at the table, and the apostles with him. 15 Then he said
to them, "I have fervently desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell
you, I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 Then he took a
cup, and after giving thanks, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. 18 For I
tell you, from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God
comes."

19 And he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, "This is my
body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
20 In the same way he also took the cup after supper and said, "This cup is the new
covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. 21 But look, the hand of the one
betraying me is at the table with me. 22 For the Son of Man will go away as it has been
determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"

[23] So they began to argue among themselves which of them it could be who was going to do it.

Passover: A day when the blood flowed.

A. We know that the Crucifixion was a bloody affair.

1. The beating of Jesus, the driven nails, the piercing of his side, all communicate the bloodiness of the weekend.

2. But long before Rome was in power, blood was part of the Passover celebration.

B. In Exodus, God's final judgment came upon Egypt.

1. To avoid the death of the firstborn sons, God instructed the Israelites to have faith, trust, and obedience in Him and to sacrifice a lamb and to eat a meal in a hurry marked by bitter herbs and unleavened bread.

2. This celebration, this remembrance, was part and parcel of the Jewish story.

3. By Jesus' day, the Passover celebration was a massive event.

4. Because all the men of Israel were required to report to at least one feast, families traveled from all over to be in Jerusalem.

C. How big?

1. Notice what historian Josephus said:

2. "The first-century historian Josephus notes one year when there were 255,660 lambs slaughtered and more than two million people present."[1]

3. Most historians think Josephus exaggerated, which is very likely.

a. Ancient historians were a lot like modern-day journalists:

b. never let facts get in the way of a good story.

4. BUT, let's estimate some possibilities based on his numbers.

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[1] Hahn, Scott. The Fourth Cup: Unveiling the Mystery of the Last Supper and the Cross (p. 35). Kindle Edition.

a. Some researchers estimate that each lamb would have 4 gallons of blood, which is probably high.

b. But, if each lamb did have 4 gallons of blood, that would be 1,022,640 gallons, or 1.5 Olympic swimming pools of blood.

5. Other estimates SLIDE

a. This is somewhat speculation.

b. Let me read to you a more academic and conservative description from one of my scholarly sources:

The sacrifice took place between the ninth and eleventh hours (roughly 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.; Josephus *J.W.* 6.9.3 §423). Mishnah tells us that when the first group entered the court (it is not clear which court, the Court of Israel seems far too small, and a larger area of the temple may have been sanctified for this purpose), the gate was closed behind them. The choir of Levites was assembled and sang the Hallel, Psalms 113–118 (or Songs of Ascent). At the sounding of the shofar, the priests lined up in rows, with gold or silver basins in their hands. Each Israelite male representative would slit the throat of his group's lamb, and a priest would catch the blood in a bowl. The bowl was then handed down the line of priests, and the one closest to the altar would throw the blood against the altar. The priest would then hang the lamb on a hook, slit it open, remove the sacrificial portions of fat and place them on the altar fire. The lamb was then returned to its owner, and when the entire group had finished, the gates would be opened and the second group would enter. The lamb was taken to the household's selected spot within the walls of Jerusalem, roasted over a fire, and eaten with unleavened bread, bitter herbs, a fruit puree, salt water and wine—the prescribed foods of Passover. By one estimate, there were approximately 300,000 pilgrims and Jerusalemites who would gather for Passover, which would represent approximately 30,000 lambs needing to be slaughtered within a two-hour period (Sanders, 136). The activity of the priests, the bleating of lambs, the flow of blood and the traffic within the temple courts is staggering to imagine. It is easy to see why at Passover (and the other major festivals) all of the priests and Levites were on duty. [2]

[2] Daniel G. Reid, "Sacrifice and Temple Service," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 1043.

E. Passover without blood was simply impossible.

1. For those of us who have butchered animals, the scale and logistics are still hard to imagine.

2. So too would be the sounds, the smell, and the experience.

A Room Prepared

A. Neither Judaism nor Christianity stays with the sacrifice.

1. Quickly, the scene moves away from the Temple and moves to a prepared room.

2. Every available space would have been booked and reserved.

3. Jewish law stated there had to be at least 10 people per lamb, so even the smallest rooms would have been crowded with people, reminiscent of the night in Egypt years before.

4. There were no women at the Temple for the sacrifice, but their voices and the voices of the children awaited the man's return and the celebration of Passover that evening.

B. You don't celebrate deliverance by accident.

1. When you read the Gospels, finding a room to host the Supper was a small miracle.

2. Then the disciples, and primarily Peter and John, we think, ensured that the preparations for everything were done.

3. The disciples knew what every woman who has ever hosted Thanksgiving or Christmas in her home knows: **Preparation precedes Presence.**

a. The Table won't set itself.

b. You have to prepare for guests.

C. You don't remember what Jesus has done at the last minute.

1. The word for remember means more than recall.

a. It means to reactualize what is remembered.

b. It means to "reestablish the former relationship" and to bring to the present what was done in the past.

c. We aren't sacrificing or killing Jesus again: In a sense, we are reenacting with the Lord.

The preparation of the room doesn't happen by accident. And the preparation of our hearts for Jesus' sacrifice doesn't either.

2. We prepare for worship because You can't sustain worship on whims and wishes.

a. The sacrifice was raised and fed by someone.

b. The room was prepared by someone.

c. The bitter herbs and food were prepared by someone.

2. **Preparation precedes worship.**

a. There are moments of spontaneous worship when a sight or a sound leads you to awe and wonder.

b. In moments like this, it is appropriate to express: Oh My God!!!

c. However, I believe that even moments like this, where it all pours out in a beautiful expression of worship, are not spontaneous at all.

d. Instead, what comes out is what has been put in.

3. Notice the contrast between Judas and the woman with the jar of perfume.

a. Same Jesus.

b. Different responses.

4. Judas sat there, in the midst of this holy Supper, and thought of money and revenge. The other disciples argued about what seat they would have in the Kingdom.

5. While Jesus was washing their feet and sharing His last meal, a few days before, the only one to worship was a woman with a jar of perfume (Matt 26).

D. I like reading and listening to old men.

1. An old man will tell you things that he wouldn't have said or couldn't have said when he was younger.

2. One of the old guys I'm reading is named A.W. Tozer.

If you cannot worship the Lord in the midst of your responsibilities on Monday, it is not very likely that you were worshiping on Sunday!

Therefore, if we are so engaged in our Saturday pursuits that we are far from His presence and far from a sense of worship on Saturday, we are not in very good shape to worship Him on Sunday.[3]

3. Could it be possible that your struggle to worship on Sunday, is because you haven't worshipped all week?

a. I don't share this to heap guilt on you.

b. Yet for many of us, we are trying to worship from an empty pot.

c. We know that not many people can run a marathon without training.

d. Not many people can bench press or squat heavy without working themselves up.

e. No one naturally throws a 100-mph fastball.

f. Great performance requires prior action.

f. I submit to you that those who worship and remember best have long been on a journey of worship.

4. Consecration (a word from last week) is preparation for a Divine purpose.

a. Consecration isn't accidental.

b. Consecration isn't last minute.

c. Consecration doesn't lack purpose.

d. Consecration has a reward.

Broken, Shed, and Blessed

A. Jesus makes a bold statement that has long divided the Church.

1. This is my body, and this is my blood.

2. All the different styles and types of churches, what we call traditions or denominations, have different understandings of what this means.

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[3] Tozer, Worship 114.

3. Exactly how it all works, I don't know.

4. Christ's presence with us is a beautiful mystery.

5. What I can say with absolute certainty is that this is serious.

B. The breaking of something is always serious.

1. Jesus' body was broken.

a. None of his bones were, as this was not permitted of a Passover lamb.

b. Because Jesus took the place of the Passover lamb, His bones could not be broken.

John 19:36 (CSB) [36] For these things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: **Not one of his bones will be broken.**

2. The rest of Jesus' body was broken.

a. In fact, I submit to you that the lambs sacrificed for the Passover were treated better than Jesus.

b. Their lives were taken quickly; Jesus was tortured.

3. Jesus knew this was coming.

a. Jesus knew!

b. As the fully human and fully divine Son of God, He knew:

1. The names of those who would flog Him.

2. The names and the voices of the people in the crowd who cried, "Crucify!"

3. He knew the hearts of those who pierced Him, hated Him, and who wanted to defend Him if they could.

c. Jesus cried out to God that this Cup would not be His to drink.

1. Jesus knew what was at stake.

2. He knew it all.

4. When Jesus held up a loaf of bread and broke it, He knew exactly what was coming.

a. He knew the cost, the pain, and the heartache.

b. He knew, so He declares: REMEMBER!!!!! (Anamnesis)

c. The breaking is always serious.

C. The Blessing is always serious.

1. To bless is a serious thing.

2. To bless means to "give thanks."

3. To bless means to "set apart, consecrate."

> The "blessing" of the bread refers to the Jewish practice of giving thanks for bread at a meal by saying, "Blessed are you, Lord, our God, who brings forth bread from the earth." Bread was considered a gift from God. It was irreverent to cut it with a knife, so it was torn (or broken) with the hands. Jesus gave the bread to the disciples to eat with the sauce. As he did so, he gave this Passover practice an entirely new meaning.[4]

4. Reverently, Jesus thanks the Lord for the bread, breaks it with His own hands, and gifts it to His disciples.

a. Jesus is the Bread of Life.

b. Given as a gift by God for the forgiveness of sins.

c. Broken by His own hands and by His own will, because no one could take Jesus' life, He gave His life as a ransom for many.

D. Blessed AND broken

1. I don't usually put these two words together.

2. Yet, they are key for understanding this night and what Jesus did for us.

3. What was pictured in the lambs at the Temple, innocent creatures who were broken so that the people of Israel might remember how God had blessed them, was now to take on an infinitely larger scale.

4. Jesus, the innocent, perfect, Son of God, was the Lamb of God, who would be broken for our trespasses and sin, and was broken for us, so that we might be blessed.

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[4] Bruce B. Barton, *Mark*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 413.

The hand of betrayal

A. One of the many similarities between this Lord's Supper and the Supper on the mountain from last week is that not all who ate with God stayed with God.

1. Nadab and Abihu were both killed shortly thereafter for offering profane fire.

2. Judas betrayed Jesus.

3. Through it all, we see that God invites people to the table I wouldn't expect or want (this is key for next week's sermon).

B. We cannot think of the Lord's Table without the pain of betrayal.

1. Not all who eat with Jesus worship Him.

2. This is not new to America, or Licking, or to a particular church.

3. Not all who attend church, listen to Christian music, or offer to pray for you are worshipping Jesus.

4. Jesus knew the pain of betrayal, and if we live long enough, we will too.

C. Some of you are walking through a season characterized by betrayal.

1. Betrayal is the destruction of trust, broken intimacy, forsaken fellowship. Lying, cheating, stealing. The death of dreams and relationships.

2. You're feeling all alone; no one understands.

3. Yet at the Lord's Supper, we open with these words: "on the night that He was betrayed!"

D. Even on the eve of the most painful day of His life, Jesus offered hope, life, and salvation.

1. On a night when we would be running away, cussing someone out, or pulling out the guns and ammunition, Jesus broke bread and shared a cup of wine with the men in the room.

2. Jesus didn't let betrayal alter His path, because He knew why He was heading to the Cross.

3. My friends, if you are walking through a season of betrayal, don't let that person or those people keep you from drawing closer to Jesus.

4. When you feel forsaken by all, know that Jesus never leaves nor forsakes you.

5. When you feel that you are too broken to continue, remember that Jesus has a way of blessing broken people and causing all things to work for good to those who love and serve Him.

Today, we remember.

A. I'm not focusing on my pain or problems.

1. Instead, I'm remembering what Jesus did for me.

2. I'm remembering how much Jesus loved me.

3. I'm remembering that Jesus loves the people that I cannot stand and even hate.

B. When we partake of communion, we meditate upon Jesus' life and death.

1. During the day, when the streets of Jerusalem flowed with the blood of lambs, that just a short time later, the blood of Jesus flowed through those same streets.

2. That sacrifice did what the sacrifice of animals never could:

3. Opened the door to God's presence for the forgiveness of sins.

4. I can't grasp it all.

5. Some of it is a mystery to me.

6. But I do believe that Jesus forgives me of all my sins, and cleanses me from all unrighteousness.

7. BECAUSE OF THIS, I live my life for Him.

Prayer