

Luke 22:14-23

A Last Meal

Everything started off so perfectly. Man and woman were in the garden, all was well, the scent of perfection permeated the air. Then came sin, and all was lost. The effects were immediate and profound.

¹⁷Then to Adam He said, ‘because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, “you shall not eat from it”;

Cursed is the ground because of you;

In toil you will eat of it

All the days of your life.

¹⁸Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;

And you will eat the plants of the field;

¹⁹By the sweat of your face

You will eat bread,

Till you return to the ground,

Because from it you were taken;

For you are dust,

And to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:17-19).

Job summed up the consequences of the curse succinctly.

¹Man, who is born of woman,

Is short-lived and full of turmoil.

²Like a flower he comes forth and withers.

He also flees like a shadow and does not remain” (Job 14:1-2).

Thankfully, our God is sovereign; “our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3). And in His sovereignty and in His grace, He had a plan for the redemption of fallen man. That plan, foretold by the prophets and foreshadowed in the celebration of the Passover, culminated in the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Let us be reminded of the fact that Jesus gave His life. No one took it from Him; He was not a victim. His death was the key element of a divine plan that was formed in the mind of God before the creation of the universe. Biblical prophecy pointed toward His death; true history remembers it. He was the true Passover lamb, crucified as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of those who believe.

As we continue our study of Luke’s gospel, it is the Thursday night of Passion week. It is the beginning of a week long celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is the Passover meal. Within twenty-four hours Jesus would be dead and buried. Within seventy-two hours He would be raised again. The Old Covenant was coming to a close, and a New Covenant was being ratified. At this last meal with His disciples, Jesus celebrated God’s deliverance of His people from their time of captivity in Egypt. He joined in this ritual meal that for nearly fifteen hundred years had been eaten on this day to commemorate God’s redemption of Israel from slavery. But He also, in that same meal, inaugurated a new ceremony;

one that would serve as a memorial for another deliverance, another redemption. His disciples did not fully understand just yet, but Jesus knew what He was doing just the same.

The Last Passover

The purpose of the Passover meal was commemorative. That is, it was instituted to have the Israelites remember a specific event; a specific sacrifice. The innocent, unblemished Passover lamb was slaughtered. Its blood, spread across the doorposts of the dwelling, signified that those within belonged to God and were preserved from judgment. For centuries animal sacrifice had formed the foundation of Jewish worship. But it was understood that these bloody sacrifices were merely a short-term solution to a long-term problem. They met the immediate requirement of obedience to the Law, but they were always intended to point toward something else; something permanent.

Luke's account of the Passover meal is maddeningly brief. Even using the other gospels we cannot be certain about the precise order of all of the events that evening. When did Jesus wash the disciples feet? When did He pray His great prayer recorded in John's gospel? When did Judas leave to find his accomplices? All of these events are blurred as we try to look back upon that night. We do have a better idea, however, the order of the meal itself, because its importance had required specific instructions to make certain it was celebrated in the same way in households throughout Israel.

Details vary, as there had been many amendments over the years, but here is a brief description of the order of the Passover Feast (Mishnah Pesachim 10):

First, a prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance and protection by the head of the family (in this case Jesus) and the drinking of the first cup of wine. This was called the cup of blessing.

Then there was a ritual hand washing to symbolize the need for spiritual cleansing. It may be that this was when Jesus washed the disciples feet.

After that was the eating of the bitter herbs dipped in a paste made from nuts and fruit (think hummus). This was to call to mind the bitterness of slavery in Egypt.

Then the group sang the Hallel Psalms 113 and 114 and drank a second cup of wine.

Then, someone was to ask "why is this night different from others?" and the head of the family (again Jesus in our case) explained the meaning of Passover.

The lamb and the unleavened bread were then eaten. This was the main meal.

Then the meal was finished, and all of the lamb must be eaten.

After the meal was finished, the third cup of wine was taken.

Finally, the the group sang Psalms 115-118 and drank the fourth cup of wine.

One thing had clearly changed since the original institution of the Passover meal. It was no longer eaten in a rush. That Jesus "reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him" (v. 14) indicated that this was a leisurely meal, eaten without haste, prolonged to enjoy the company and conversation of close friends.

There must have been great emotion in this moment. Jesus told His disciples that "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (v.15). Perhaps it was with these sobering words that the meal began. Surely, no one could mistake the pathos of the moment. Jesus wanted to celebrate

one last time (on this earth) with His disciples. Jesus knew He would suffer. He knew that He would die. He knew that He would “never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (v. 16).

Until what was fulfilled? Until the plan of God for the salvation of those who believe had been completed. That was why this last statement contained a promise as well. While this would be the last Passover Jesus ate on this earth, He would celebrate again with His disciples in His coming kingdom. (By the way, this was a statement that produced some confusion, and some competition, as we will see next week). In His future kingdom, Jesus would again fellowship with His disciples. They would again eat and drink and talk together. But the conversation on that great day would not be about the redemption of Israel from Egypt, but the redemption of mankind from sin.

The First Lord’s Supper

“When He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, ‘take this and share it among yourselves’” (v. 17). Jesus gave thanks. In Greek it is the word *eucharisteō*, which has lent itself to the modern term eucharist. This was probably the first cup of wine, the cup of blessing. That they shared the cup only increased the sense of unity among them, though it must be remembered that Judas was still present at this stage of the evening.

Then Jesus repeated what He had said earlier, “for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes” (v. 18). Jesus spoke emphatically here. He used the strongest form of negation available in the language. This was to be his final meal, truly a last supper. Jesus was resolved. The disciples must have been overwhelmed with emotion.

And then came the moment. “¹⁹When He had taken some bread and 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.’ ²⁰And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘this cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood’” (v. 19-20). The reference to “after they had eaten” suggests that this happened after the meal had been completed. This would imply that the cup mentioned was the third cup of wine. This seems affirmed by Paul, “in the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘this cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me’” (1 Corinthians 11:25).

This was the moment when Jesus marked the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. This New Covenant was written not on stone but on the hearts of believers. This New Covenant was not between God and Israel but between God and believers. It would be completed the next day at Calvary, but here, in this pronouncement, Jesus asserted that the old had gone and the new had come.

It would have been inconceivable that the disciples would have misunderstood the blood reference. No longer would animal sacrifices be required. No longer would the great curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple be needed. No longer would there be the need for a priesthood to mediate for man to God. All that had been symbolized would now become a reality. What Passover pointed toward, the Lord’s Supper would remember.

But we must pause to address a significant misunderstanding about this moment. Roman Catholicism teaches the doctrine of transubstantiation. This is the notion that when the priest says “*hoc est corpus meum*” the bread and wine cease to be what they appear to be, and actually become the literal body and blood of Christ. Lutheranism holds to the doctrine of consubstantiation. This is the doctrine that while remaining bread and wine, the literal body of Christ is “in, with, and under” the elements of the Lord’s Supper. To Catholics, the bread and wine have become the literal body of Christ. To Lutherans the body of Christ is present in addition to the bread and wine.

There are several problems with these interpretations of the words of Jesus. First, Jesus said this while He was sitting right in front of them. The very physical reality of Jesus’ presence in the room makes it impossible to believe that He meant that He had actually changed Himself into bread and wine. Second, Jesus added the terms “in remembrance of Me.” Why would He need to be remembered if He was actually present. If the bread and wine actually *are* Jesus, then there is no need to remember Him, He is there in the form of bread and wine.

Finally, we must remember that Jesus often used figurative language. Consider the following:

“Jesus answered them, ‘destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’” (John 2:19).

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God’” (John 3:3).

“¹³Jesus answered and said to her, ‘everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life’” (John 4:13-14).

“I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh” (John 6:51).

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser . . . I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:1,5).

While this way of speaking often caused some confusion among His listeners, that confusion only points to the fact that Jesus often spoke in symbolic ways. There is no more reason to assume that Jesus was speaking literally in this passage than in any other mentioned above.

Not to be overlooked is the phrase “given for you.” This is Jesus’ promise of atonement. Jesus did not just die. He died for the sins of those who believe. He did not want to be remembered as a profound teacher, or miracle worker, or even as a good friend. The purpose of the Lord’s Supper was to remember Jesus as our Savior.

Cur Deus Homo was a treatise written in the 11th century by Anselm of Canterbury. In it, he explained most elegantly why Jesus Christ became man. Because of sin, man had offended God. However, the offense was so great, and God’s holiness so pure, that it was impossible for a mere man to make appropriate satisfaction for the offense. Nothing man could do could ever be good enough to make good the debt. Therefore, in order to satisfy the debt, God had to become man. It was the only way. Therefore, Jesus became the “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

This is a truth that permeates both the Old and New Testaments. To offer only a few examples,

“⁵But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
⁶All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him” (Isaiah 53:5-6).

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The Betrayal Announced

As perfect as this moment seemed, it was not. Jesus continued, “²¹the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. ²²For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” (v. 21-22). The strong word that began the sentence broke the spell of the moment. The disciples had often heard Jesus talk about His death. They had witnessed first-hand the confrontations in recent days between Jesus and the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. But to think that it could be one of their own must have been a shock.

Here we must address what can appear to be some confusion in the gospel narratives. Matthew seems to indicate in his account that Judas left to betray Jesus before He instituted the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:20-29). Mark, in his narrative seems to imply the same (Mark 14:17-25). Again, though, we must remember that none of the writers set out to give a moment-by-moment account of the evening. Clearly Judas was present when they were eating. All writers agree on that. Judas shared Jesus’ last meal with Him. This is profound considering the meaning of a meal in Jewish culture. To share a meal was a personal act. It was not done with strangers. It was not done with Gentiles. To eat with someone symbolized community. Judas ate with Jesus, then left to orchestrate His capture. Such treachery is the main point of the passage, not the specific sequence of events.

Note also that predestination and prophecy did not cancel human responsibility. “Woe to that man” is Jesus’ condemnation. Judas chose to do what he did. That it fulfilled God’s sovereign, ordained plan did not excuse him. The relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility is, for us, inscrutable. But we cannot dispute what Scripture teaches. God is in control, and man is responsible for his actions.

The disciples were undone. They “began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing” (v. 23). Luke gives us no further details of the conversation, but there are more details in the other three accounts.

Jesus' words seem to have evoked three responses.

Some of the disciples had genuine self-doubt. "They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, 'surely not I?'" (Mark 14:19).

Judas, tried to deflect attention from himself. "And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, 'surely it is not I, Rabbi?' Jesus said to him, 'you have said it yourself'" (Matthew 26:25).

Others were inquisitive to know whom it might be. "²³There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, 'tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.' ²⁵He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to Him, 'Lord, who is it?'" (John 13:23-25).

After this Judas left. He disappeared into the quiet streets of Jerusalem and made his way to those he had conspired with to betray Jesus. Jesus and the others remained in the room enjoying the last of the meal and a time of rich fellowship. A bit later, Jesus would take some of His disciples out to walk in a local garden and pray.

Takeaways

First, let us remember that the principal object of the institution of the Lord's Supper was to establish a commemorative celebration of Christ's death. It was simple. There was no mystery intended.

Second, the observance is obligatory on all believers. These words are a command. There is no reason to suppose Jesus meant this for His disciples only.

Third, Jesus did not give specific details regarding the practice of the Lord's Supper. For example, Jesus was not in the temple. That is, He was not in a place of worship, so we can infer that the Lord's Supper need not be restricted to a church service. Also, Jesus did not prohibit anyone from participating. Again, the order of events is unclear, but Judas may have been a part of the Lord's Supper. It is not the role of the church to test those who would participate. A corollary of this is that we should also not assume that all who take the Lord's Supper are believers. And, Jesus did not set down how often the Lord's Supper was to be taken. It seems the early church did it more frequently than we do today, but there is no Biblical command for the frequency of the Lord's Supper.

Fourth, we should never do the Lord's Supper as a matter of obligation. It should never be something we do because we have to. This makes it like the other disciplines of the faith (Bible reading, giving, prayer, etc.).

Finally, we should never enter into it in a state of sin. Paul wrote, "²⁷therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly" (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

The Lord's Supper marks the most significant event of our faith. It is profound and deeply meaningful. May we participate in it with enthusiasm, reverence, and gratitude.