

The Significance of the Lord's Supper

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[0 : 0 0] Well, you would have picked up that we are going to share communion after the sermon. But before we do, as we prepare to take communion as Christians, I want to ask you, how important is that for you?

Or could you do without it? How important is it for you to take communion? I think a lot of Christians would say, oh, it's very important for us to do it. But in the same way that maybe paying our car license is important.

I think a lot of Christians might see this tradition, which we do on a regular basis, kind of like renewing your car license, where it's something you know you've got to do.

It's good to do. But if you didn't have to do it, well, you know, that would be fine too. How important is biting into this bread for you and drinking of this cup? If we ran out and it didn't get to you, how bothered would you be?

Not that bothered, maybe? You know, we've got the Bible. I've got the Bible. I've got the Holy Spirit. I've got everything I need here. I don't need more than that. Well, Jesus thinks you do.

[1 : 0 5] Jesus thinks you need to eat of this meal. In fact, in all four of the Gospels, one of the few things in all four of the Gospels is Jesus commanding the eating of this meal.

And in the New Testament through the Apostle Paul, Jesus again reaffirms the importance of this seemingly mundane tradition of taking a little piece of bread, taking a little cup of juice, eating and drinking.

What is, why does Jesus see that as something so important? Well, he does. And we see that in today's passage.

In Mark 14, Jesus shares the last supper with his disciples before he dies on the cross the next day. And this, you can see, Jesus makes a very big point to make it very significant for his disciples.

And this is, of course, this last supper is the basis for us continuing to eat it as his disciples, as he's commanded us to do. And as we look at these verses, what I want you to do is keep Mark 14 in your Bibles, open in front of you or bring it up on your phone or whatever.

[2 : 1 3] And look, we're going to concentrate just on four verses, verse 22 to 25. Because these verses where Jesus shares this meal, just four verses are packed with meaning.

And so let's see what we can determine Jesus says is the meaning of this sign that we're going to partake in later as we prepare for it. So there's three things that we need to understand about this Lord's Supper.

The first thing we see from this passage is that it was originally a Jewish Passover meal, the Jewish Passover. Jesus made a big deal about eating Passover with his disciples.

There was a whole lot of other stuff going on, but he made a point and he planned ahead that they were going to eat this Passover meal. Now, as non-Jews, most of us are not Jewish by descent.

We probably don't appreciate just the significance and the centrality of this Passover meal in the Jewish calendar. Once a year, Jews then and today as well still celebrate the Passover meal where they gather together and they remember how God rescued the Israelites out of Egypt miraculously.

[3 : 25] You know the stories, Moses, parting of the Red Sea, you know all that stuff, the plagues. And the last plague, of course, was the angel of death passing over, killing the firstborn to all who didn't have the blood of the Lamb painted on their doors.

And they remember this every year. They remember this amazing historical event that happened so that they could be freed from slavery in Egypt.

And in this Passover meal, anybody ever had a Passover meal, maybe with Jewish friends or anything? Okay. So some of you know what's involved in it. There's this number of symbolic foods.

And the youngest child in the family, their job is to ask what are called the four questions. They ask the father or the host of the meal to explain the symbolism of each of these elements.

And they do that every year. So they'll ask about, so one of the foods is the matzah, the unleavened bread. Anybody like matzah? Yeah, with some marmite on it? It's quite yummy, actually.

[4 : 28] But to them, it's far more than just a nice snack. It had a symbolic meaning. And they had bitter herbs as well, which had a symbolic meaning. And the youngest child would ask, what is the meaning of the matzah?

And the father would explain, well, this is reminding us of the haste that we needed to leave when God rescued us from Egypt. And then the child would ask, what is the meaning of the bitter herbs? And the father would explain, this reminds us about bitterness in slavery in Egypt that God rescued us from.

So each of these elements in the meal had a symbolic meaning. And now Jesus shares this Jewish Passover with his disciples. But this Passover is different.

Because Jesus doesn't follow the formula. Instead of explaining the old symbols, the matzah and the bitter herbs, Jesus explains new symbols.

He makes new symbols for a new type of Passover that he wants his disciples to eat from now on. Look at the symbols he makes. From verse 22, as they were eating, he took bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to them and said, take this is my body.

[5 : 38] And this is the first time the disciples have heard this. That's not what they expect from the Passover meal. Then he took a cup and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and they drank from it. He said, this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.

So this is a new type of Passover. And Jesus is wanting his disciples as they take this new reformed Passover.

He's wanting to tell them that just as God rescued old Israel from slavery in Egypt. And gave them freedom from that slavery.

He's saying to his disciples, his death the next day is going to rescue the new Israel from a much worse slavery.

The slavery to sin, which we are all by nature slaves of. We are all by nature slaves to sinful inclinations in our hearts.

[6 : 37] And Jesus is saying, just as sure as God rescued the Israelites from Egypt, he's going to rescue you from slavery to sin. And we know, of course, from what the rest of the New Testament teaches, that that's what Jesus' death achieved.

For his people, for those who have faith in him, his death atoned for their sins. It rescued them from the consequences, the eternal consequences of sinning against God.

Then his resurrection and his ascension and his pouring out of the Spirit gave them power to overcome sin. It very literally freed his people from slavery. And this meal, as we take it, is a reminder of that.

Just as the Jews in Passover remembered their freedom from slavery in Egypt, we remember our freedom from slavery to sin if we're Christians. And we realize we have been freed.

We have been rescued from the power of sin. We don't have to listen to it anymore. Because of what Jesus did in history, this is a reminder of our rescue. And just as the Jews remembered the bitterness of slavery as they took those bitter herbs, Christians remember as we take this blood, we remember the price of sin.

[7 : 53] We remember the price of the sin that we nonchalantly commit week by week. That it required blood to pay for it. It required real physical death as a consequence.

That's what you've been saved from. The destruction of your body forever is what you've been rescued from. I don't know about you, but this constant reminder that I've been rescued from sin, and this is the price it took.

The Son of God dying on the cross for me. The constant reminder of that, it makes me take sin much more seriously in my life. You know, as Christians, we know we've been saved from sin.

And so when we sin, we feel bad, but we know we can confess, and we know we can be forgiven. But then I think it often runs the risk of us thinking that sin's not that serious.

This reminds us that it is. This reminds us that every sin you commit cost a dear price that Jesus paid. And so it's a reminder to look back on the event that earned your freedom, and not take that freedom for granted.

[9 : 09] That's the first thing, this meal, is to remind Christians who take it of. And, you know, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11, that you must discern the body.

You must know what this meal means when you take it. You must just take it as a tradition. Then you're eating and drinking judgment on yourself, he says. So he says, you must take it with your mind working, with your mind going, I must remember what this means.

I must remember what this means. I'm going to do my best to help you, but you've got to do the work, if you're a Christian, of taking this, knowing what it means. And that is only one of the three things that it means, according to what Jesus says here.

It's a Passover meal that makes us look back on Jesus' death for our sins. But secondly, it's a covenant meal. And this is an aspect that I think many Christians are not familiar with.

They stop at seeing this as a remembrance. But it's more than that. It's much more than that. And we see that in what Jesus says next. Look at what he says in verse 24.

[10 : 12] He says a phrase which is not normally used in Passover. And it's a strange phrase that we often just skip over because we've heard it so often. But I want us to stop and think about what it means. Verse 24, he said to them, This is my blood of the covenant.

What does that mean? Well, a Jew would have understood. The disciples didn't say the blood of your what, Jesus?

Because they knew what he meant. Because they knew the Old Testaments. We don't. That phrase comes from Exodus 24. Where there's a meal. But it's not the Passover meal. And there's blood, but it's not Passover atoning blood.

It's something else. Exodus 24. I'm going to read from some of it again. Heron read from it earlier. You can turn in your Bibles if you want to.

This is an important event to understand. If we can understand what Jesus is saying about this Last Supper with his disciples. So in Exodus 24, this is the start of Israel's special relationship with God.

[11 : 20] God chose Israel for a time to be a nation that he was going to have a relationship with that he did not have with any other nation. Called a covenant through which he would do his saving work.

And when he called Israel to enter into the special relationship with him. And there were terms both sides. Then this is what happened.

In Exodus 24. I'm going to read from verse 6. Moses took half the blood and set it in basins. The other half of the blood he splattered on the altar. Then he took the covenant scroll and read it aloud to the people.

They responded, we will do and obey all the Lord has commanded. Moses took the blood and splattered it on the people. Now just pause there.

You can just picture the scene. They're standing there waiting for Moses. What's he going to do? What's he going to do? And then he takes his blood and they're just, what on earth? Because they didn't understand what was going on.

[12 : 19] This is the first time that it had happened. But it's got a very symbolic meaning. Because he says next, verse 8. This is the blood of the covenant. That's the term Jesus uses. That the Lord has made with you concerning all these words.

Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, 70 of Israel's elders. And they saw the God of Israel beneath his feet with something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as clear as the sky itself.

And God did not harm the Israelite nobles. They saw him and they ate and drank. They had a meal with God. This is incredible.

I mean, I assume they had time to go and wash their faces of all the blood before they went to this very important meal with God himself up on the mountain.

And this was the beginning of Israel's relationship with God. Now, it's not strange if we know a bit about the ancient world.

[13 : 20] And what's going on here is actually patterned after what kings would do when they made covenant relationships with other kings. So, especially when a big, powerful king would make a relationship with a vassal king, that this king would fall under his rule, they would do a number of things.

Firstly, they would seal their relationship in blood. So, there would be this contract between the two kings. This is what I'm going to do. This is what I promise. This is what you promise. And they would seal it in blood. It would be a blood oath.

They would sacrifice an animal as a way of saying, this is what's going to happen. This blood is the price of breaking this agreement. And then the second thing they would do is they would have a meal to confirm that this new relationship is now in force when they have that meal.

So, it's kind of like we have a wedding reception today. You know, after a couple get married, there's normally a very important meal. And people will spend a lot of money on a wedding reception because it's a significant meal.

It's not just like any other meal. It's the beginning of a new relationship, not just between husband and wife, but between their two families. That's why their families are part of this reception meal. That they're getting to know each other.

[14 : 27] And this meal is signifying that they are now related. That they are now in a new relationship. Well, Jesus is using this meal in the same way.

By saying what Moses said, this is the blood of the covenant. Jesus is saying that as his disciples partake in this meal, they too are entering into a new covenant relationship with God.

And whenever, from now on, his disciples eat this in faith of what it means, God is doing something.

He is saying something. He is again confirming in these signs that the relationship he made 2,000 years ago is still in force today.

For all who participate in this meal. This is something God is doing. This is something that God gives us. Not me.

[15 : 24] I don't give this to you. That's why, by the way, I wear, you will have noticed, I wear my clerical collar whenever we share in communion. Why do I do that? Because I don't do this in my own capacity. Only as an agent, a minister in God's church of what he is doing.

He is feeding you this meal. And by doing it, he is giving you a sign when you take it in faith into yourself and you believe in what it represents. God is saying to you, my covenant is, you are still in my covenant.

My covenant relationship is still in force. You can trust that. Today, as much as it was thousands of years ago. Now, why is that important?

Why is that important for me to partake in as a Christian? Well, it's important because I don't need to rely on my feelings to tell me about my relationship with God. If God has given me a physical sign to seal my relationship with him, to confirm it.

Do you understand what I'm saying? I think so many Christians make the mistake of relying on our feelings to tell us about our relationship with God. Don't we? Oh, I feel so guilty this week.

[16 : 31] I have committed this sin. I fell here. I feel so far from God. You've heard Christians say, I feel so far from God. Well, that is actually stamping underfoot this covenant sign God has given us that we don't have to feel far from him.

Here, God gives us a sign outside of ourselves that we take in so we don't have to rely on our inward feelings to tell us about our relationship with him.

He gives us this outward objective sign to confirm our relationship with him on a regular basis. And it's not inside ourselves. It comes from outside.

And that's important. It's something we can look at and remember and be reminded of the relationship God has confirmed. It's like a wedding ring, right? If you're married, you probably wear a wedding ring.

And I love my wedding ring, not just because it's shiny and gold, but because it's a message. Every time I look at it, I know that I'm still married to my wife. It's an objective reminder of the status of my relationship with my wife.

[17 : 36] That every time I look at this, I know I'm married to Jean irrespective of how I feel inside. And how I feel day to day. And I'm married to her irrespective of how good a husband I've been this week.

Thank goodness for that. So that's why I look at the wedding ring quite often. Because it reminds me that I'm in an objective relationship that doesn't depend on how I feel.

And that's what Jesus wanted his people to remember as they partake in this covenant meal. That because of what he did, we are in right relationship with God irrespective of how we feel.

You might not feel great today. You might not feel in love with God. You might not feel the right feelings. And yet God is saying it doesn't matter. Obviously, you want to feel the right way, but it doesn't matter because he is confirming from outside of yourself that you're still in covenant with him.

And I don't know about you, but I need that. I need a reminder of that from outside of myself. That I'm right with God. That's the second meaning.

[18 : 44] It's the blood of the covenant. It's a covenant sign. That seals, that tells us that this relationship is still in force. But there's a third meaning Jesus gives in these few verses.

I wonder if you spotted it. He says, thirdly, this meal is a signpost to another meal in the future. And that's one more thing Jesus wants his disciples to think about when they are taking this.

Look at verse 25. Truly I tell 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. He's using this meal that they're taking.

And this is not a good time for them. They're about to enter the trial of their lives. They're already in a very stressful time. And yet, he's using this meal to point to something in the future that he wants them to think about.

He's using this meal as a foretaste of the meal that all his people will enjoy one day after the resurrection. And it will be such a party.

[19 : 53] I mean, the words of prophets could never quite entail what it's going to be like when we rise from the dead in our physical bodies and we'll be hungry. And God will have a huge meal laid out for his people.

Isaiah 25 says, On this mountain, the Lord of armies will prepare for all the people a feast of choice meat, a feast with aged wine, prime cuts of choice meat, fine vintage wine.

The point is, it's going to taste like you've never tasted anything before. God invented our taste buds. And so God knows exactly what food is going to taste great.

And he's preparing a meal for his people. Jesus pointed towards this. He hinted at it in his first miracle. You know what his first recorded miracle was?

He provided wine for a party. The wedding in Cana and John. And it wasn't just any wine. It wasn't, you know, Robertson box wine from Spa.

[20 : 56] It was the best wine these people had ever tasted. Jesus was showing off. He's saying, this is what God wants you to enjoy. God wants you to enjoy all of his gifts without limit.

And he has that prepared for his people after we rise from the dead in the new creation. And that reminds us that salvation is not just spiritual. It's physical.

It's physical resurrection. It's physical eating and drinking, but far better than we've ever enjoyed in this life. It's the joy of God's gifts without any limit and without our sins spoiling those things.

And this meal is meant to point towards that. Now, you might look at your tiny little, like, centimeter by centimeter piece of bread and go, really?

This is supposed to point towards that meal you've just described? And that is one objection people have to communion. Is it such a small, insignificant piece of bread?

[21 : 57] And such a tiny cup of juice, it's not even wine. Can't we at least have wine? It's just grape juice. And they say, how can this possibly point towards this future feast?

But remember, these are symbols. These are symbols pointing to something much better. And no matter how good we made this bread or big, we made the portions or nice, we made the grape juice or wine, it would never be what it's going to be one day.

It's symbols pointing towards. And the fact that it's far less than it will be actually is kind of the point. Because it's saying that you can't yet in this life experience what you're going to experience in the life to come.

But this reminds you of that. It points you towards that. And so, as we take this small token in a world that is not like it should be, where we do have scarcity, where we don't have enough, where the world is characterized by little insignificant pieces of bread, where there's scarcity, and there's trouble, and there's stress, like Jesus' disciples are going through.

We take this meal in the midst of all that, because it should make us look forward to when such scarcity and stress will be no more. And so that's the third thing Jesus wanted His disciples to think about then and today when we share this meal.

[23 : 20] He wants us to think about these things. I want to summarize how I prepare to take the Lord's Supper as a Christian, bringing all these things together. How should we approach the Lord's Supper?

Well, I find it helpful to look in three directions before I take the Lord's Supper. Look back. Look around. And then look forward.

Back into the past, around into the present, and forward into the future, because those are the three directions that Jesus wants His disciples to look when they're sharing this meal. Look back on what Jesus did, the price He paid to free you from your sin.

Look around. Realize that because of what He did in His body and blood, you are now a member of the covenant community and in table fellowship with God and in right relationship with God.

And you share that with your brothers and sisters around you. And then look forward. See this as a token that foreshadows a much better meal to come.

[24 : 22] That is what the Lord's Supper means, according to Jesus. But before we finish and we share this supper, there's something else I need to say.

Because as we look at Mark again, this supper does not happen in a vacuum. It's surrounded by events that are happening in the narrative of Mark.

And they're very important. Because the way Mark puts it, the way it's recorded here, teaches us not only what the Lord's Supper means, but why we need it. Because notice, as you look at Jesus sharing the first Lord's Supper in verse 22 to 25, look on either side of that passage.

What do we read about? All around the Lord's Supper, what's happening? The disciples are failing. Over and over again.

The Supper is framed by predictions of the disciples' failure. Verse 18, One of you is going to betray me. Verse 27, All of you will fall away.

[25 : 34] Peter, No, I'm not going to fall away. They might all fall. I'm not going to fall away. So, Jesus says, No, you're going to do worse. You're going to deny me. You're going to deny that you ever knew me. Three times.

And when Peter is adamant that he won't, then Jesus does something right at the end of this passage from verse 32. And he says, Okay, okay. You think you can do what I need you to do.

I'm going to go pray. You've got one thing to do. Stay awake. And he comes. He goes, praises. He comes back. They're asleep. Does it three times. He wants to prove the point.

You think, Peter, and the rest of the disciples that you have what it takes. You don't. You don't even have what it takes to keep awake. And he explains it in verse 38. This is how he explains.

And this is kind of what this whole little section is illustrating. He says, The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. In other words, disciples, Christian, no matter how good you want to be, no matter how good you want to be in your spirit, no matter how good a Christian you would like to be, you can't.

[26 : 46] You will inevitably fail. I'm going to say that again. No matter how good you want to be for God, you will inevitably fail.

And I think we all know that's true. Because we all fail. We all fail God. Week after week after week. And so even as Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane, agonizing and doesn't want to go through with this, who would want to go through with what he's going to go through the next day?

And he says, he says in verse 36, take this cup away from me, Abba, Father, take it away. He doesn't want to go through with this. But he knows he must.

He knows it's the will of God. Because he knows his disciples will never be able to save themselves because they fail. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

And as we come to terms with the fact that we are these disciples, we are no different. That we will all inevitably fail.

[27 : 54] We will all fail sometimes to be the husbands we want to be, the wives we want to be, the fathers, the mothers we want to be, the people for God that we want to be.

We will all inevitably fail. The spirit might be willing, but the flesh will be weak. And that's the realization we need of our weak flesh if we are to be hungry for this meal that Jesus offers us.

You know, when you feel hungry, it's your body telling you that you don't have everything inside it that you need.

That is what hunger is, literally. It's your body saying you need something from outside if you're going to survive. That's why your body makes you feel hungry. We have to feel hungry for this.

If you do not feel hungry for this, if you do not realize that you do not have it in yourself to be the person that you want to be, that God calls you to be, if you're not hungry for this, then you are still like Peter, still thinking, no, no, no, everybody else might, but I'm going to do what you want me to do because I'm strong enough.

[29 : 01] You're not. You need to be hungry for this. And so if you are hungry this morning for this meal, if you know that you're a failure, like me, then I say to you, come, take, eat.

And as you do, look back on what Jesus did to free you from your sin. Look around today to God's confirmation that you are in His covenant people and in right relationship with Him, irrespective of how you feel inside, and look forward to the day when sin and weakness will be no more.

Let's pray as we prepare to take this meal together. Lord, we thank you that you know us so well. You know our failures.

You know our fleeting, fickle feelings, and you give us a sign regularly to remind us of what you've done for us and what it means for us today and what it means for our future.

Lord, please help us to be hungry for this meal now. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.