

The Last Supper

Mark 14:12-31

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Last week, we saw a woman's extravagant act of love as she anointed Jesus as a dinner party with expensive perfume. As Jesus defends her actions, he reveals a startling surprise—her act of love was anointing his body before hand for burial. Jesus knows the time of his death approaches. Tension has filled this last week before his death. As he's in the city of Jerusalem for the Passover, the conflict with the religious leaders has intensified, and they now want him dead. However, after this act of anointing, the dark cloud of the crucifixion engulfs Jesus. The hour has come for Jesus to accomplish his mission, which was to provide salvation for sinners through his death.

In our passage today, we see a somber but calm Jesus prepared to face his upcoming sufferings. Knowing the time of his death quickly approaches, he makes preparations for a final night with his disciples to celebrate the Passover meal. At this Passover meal, Jesus institutes the last supper which encapsulates his mission for humanity. As we set our attention on Mark 14:12-31, we will discover that Jesus prepares and gives us the Lord's Supper to remind us of the Gospel

1. Christ Prepares for the Lord's Supper (12-21)

In these final hours, we see that Jesus remains in complete and total control. As we think about Jesus' last days, some have suggested that Jesus just got caught up in the wrong place at the wrong time, that the power of the Jewish leaders and Romans overwhelmed him, leading to his young death. Nothing could be further from the truth. As we read these accounts of Jesus final hours, we see that not only does Jesus know what is to come, but he squarely meets his death without fear. He goes before the cross willingly, as a lamb before the slaughter.

Despite the suffering that awaits him, Jesus keeps his composure, and exhibits complete control over what is taking place. We see that Jesus makes preparations for a final meal with his disciples. They will celebrate the Jewish Passover together, in that upper room. The disciples go and implement Jesus' plan and make arrangements for the Passover celebration. In God's providence and will, God ordained that the time of Jesus' sacrifice would coincide with Passover.

Though the disciples have yet to fully realize it, Jesus knows that this is his last supper with his disciples, and this last supper would be a Passover meal. The Passover was an annual time of celebration for the Jewish people. God commanded them to keep this annual day of remembrance of the first Passover. Back when the children of Abraham were enslaved in Egypt, God had sent the prophet Moses to liberate the people from the hand of Pharaoh. However, Pharaoh's hardened heart kept him from letting the people go. As the Lord unleashed plague after plague, they grew in intensity, culminating in a final deadly

plague—the death of the first born. The Lord would take the life of every first born child in the land, Egyptian and Jewish alike! However, the Lord provided a way to escape the plague of death. He instructed the people to sacrifice an unblemished lamb and paint its blood across the door posts. The scarlet stained doors would ensure that the plague would Passover their houses, sparing the life of the firstborn. The Passover event would forever mark the memory of Israel, and it is the occasion that Jesus and the thousands of pilgrims are in Jerusalem for this week, for the Passover celebration! This day filled their collective memory with ideas of redemption, liberation, rescue, and atonement.

God had decided that this would be the fitting time for the true Passover lamb to be given for the sins of humanity. After all, the blood of animals never washed away anyone's sins. The entire sacrificial engine of the Law pointed to the one and only sacrifice—the lamb of God. Jesus' final meal before his death would be with his disciples at this Passover celebration. Jesus would lead it, and in his leadership of the celebration, he would add new meaning to the significance of Passover, instruct his disciples about the meaning of his upcoming death, and institute the Lord's Supper as an ordinance for his church.

Though Jesus knows what's to come, he exhibits such confidence and love. He knows Judas prepares to betray him. Judas was perturbed that the lavish ointment costing close to \$30,000 would be wasted on Jesus. He was a lover of money, and hoped to sell the perfume and then pocket the cash. In Mark's Gospel, we see that after this confrontation, Judas had enough and arranges the betrayal with the religious leaders. Yet, Jesus reveals his knowledge of the betrayal, and gives Judas an opportunity to repent. Even as the hour of his suffering has arrived, he still pursues Judas. Jesus tells them at the table that night, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me."

The disciples get sorrowful and begin to ask the Lord, "Is it I?" Judas, I'm sure goes along with fake humility. However, Jesus could have very well pointed his finger at Judas and said, "This man has betrayed me!" No doubt, bombastic Peter would have put Judas in a death grip, ready to deal with the betrayer! However, Jesus does nothing of the sort, rather he is extending Judas opportunity to confess and restore. In John's Gospel, Jesus identifies Judas to one disciple saying, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." Such an act of dipping a morsel of bread and handing it to another was a cultural act of friendship. In such an act, Jesus offers Judas friendship and forgiveness. Immediately after this act, Judas' heart burned with rage and John tells us that "Satan entered into him." In Jesus' final offer of friendship, Judas rejects him and turns him over to the religious leaders.

Jesus does not stop Judas, and even though the man has betrayed him, doesn't cease to offer him forgiveness. The compassion of Christ swells for Judas even in his act of betrayal. As Jesus offers him forgiveness, his heart enrages in hate. Judas' story is a tragedy, and true was Jesus words, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

Judas is a warning to all of us. Here was one of Jesus' closest disciples, yet he was not of them. He had feigned and fooled everyone, yet the Lord saw his heart. Don't be a Judas. Some superficially attach themselves to Jesus and the Church for some sort of perceived benefit. All the while, you heart boils in hatred towards Jesus and the church. You can fool a lot of people with your hypocrisy. Yet, you can't fool Jesus. For the Judas's in this room, Christ offers you a morsel of bread, offering you forgiveness and friendship. Don't storm away in hatred. Humble yourself and receive his offer of grace.

In Jesus' final hour, we see his confidence, courage, and compassion. He has prepared for this meal, just as the Father had prepared this time for his death. The great plan of redemption the triune God orchestrated before the foundations of the earth was coming into place. The time, location, and setting was in place. The hour of suffering now dawns. Yet, Jesus utilizes the passover meal and turns it into something greater and more meaningful. Christ gives us the Lord's Supper.

2. Christ Gives us the Lord's Supper (22-25)

The Lord's Supper is a gift to the church. On this final night with his disciples, he takes the familiar passover meal and adds new meaning to it. As they reclined around the table, he took the bread, blessed it, and broke it. He gave it to them and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took the cup, blessed it, and passed it around to the disciples to drink. He said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Throughout church history, this ordinance given to us by Jesus has marked the church of God. However, the Lord's Supper has often been a source of debate. What actually takes place in the Lord's Supper? Well the Catholic Church holds to the doctrine of transubstantiation, where the substance of the bread and wine are transformed into the literal body and blood of Christ. We reject that Catholic teaching as unbiblical, grounded in the Aristotelean philosophy of the Middle Ages and not taught in Scripture. We affirm that Jesus intends his words to be

symbolic. The bread and cup don't literally turn into the body and blood of Christ, rather they represent the body and blood of Christ.

Many of us Protestant churches, who separate ourselves from the Catholic Church over doctrinal impurity, have a different understanding of the Lord's Supper. Because we protestants reject the Catholic Sacramental system as an abandonment of the biblical teaching of justification by faith, we've distanced ourselves from the weekly taking of the Lord's Supper. In order to highlight the preaching of the Word and the Gospel, the Lord's Supper is often reduced as an aspect of our worship together. Thus, many church's, including our own church, celebrate the Supper quarterly. Though I agree, with the desire to keep the focus on God's Word and the Gospel in our worship, I think it is an over reaction to confine the Lord's supper to such infrequency. The Lord Jesus has given this ordinance for our good. It is a means of grace that builds up the church, reminding one another of the unity we have in Jesus. Though the Lord's Supper doesn't bring salvation to our souls, it is a tangible weekly reminder, a habit that orients our hearts and minds around the Gospel. Like every other means of grace God gives us, the Lord's Supper spiritually forms us in the pattern of the Gospel. It ought to be a weekly act in which we rehearse the Gospel together. Let me lay my own convictions on the table. Over recent years, I've become convinced that it is a good thing to regularly observe the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis. Now, we have no immediate plans of revising our quarterly practice any time soon, though I do hope, even through this sermon today, that you will begin to see the reasoning for practicing the supper more frequently together.

I think one of the reasons we struggle with the Lord's Supper is that we aren't quite sure what to do with it. What is it actually accomplishing? What's the point?

Let me give you three purposes in how God intends for the Lord's Supper for our good.

First, the Lord's Supper *rehearses* the gospel. When you are in a play or a show, rehearsals are essential to make sure everyone knows their lines and their responsibility in the drama. It is a time to practice and remember. In the same way, the Lord's Supper was given to us by Jesus to rehearse the gospel. As the body of Christ gathers together, the Lord's Supper collectively reminds us of our identity in Christ, so that we can live out the Gospel in our daily lives.

We all have a tendency to forget who we really are. We get so caught up in our own day to day activities, that our identity begins to shift away from Christ. The Lord's Supper is a habit of grace that reminds us of what Christ has done for us. As we take of his body in the eating of the bread, we anchor our identity in the body of Christ. As we taste his blood in the drinking of the cup, we ground our hope in the blood of Christ that washes our sin. We ought to take of the supper regularly and often, because God uses it to rehearse how the Gospel has transformed our lives. When the body of Christ takes of this supper together, they rehearse the Gospel so that they can then live out the Gospel as they go about their week. Worship on Sunday morning is a time to recalibrate our souls.

Have you ever driven a car that was out of alignment? It's one of the most frustrating experiences. As you try to go straight on the highway, the car drifts to the left. Rather than coasting, you constantly have to over compensate in your steering to make sure you don't end up in a ditch. When your car does that, you need to get the car realigned, so it drives straight again. In the same way, the human heart drifts and wanders each week. Morning worship aligns our soul to focus our lives exclusively on Christ. We are like a compass that's forgotten true north. The Lord's Supper recalibrates our heart and helps us find true north again.

Second, the Lord's Supper *unifies* the church. Christ has given us this ordinance for the building up of his church. Church unity is elusive, easily slipping through our fingers. I remember one deacon coming up to me several years ago and asked an honest question: "how do we find unity as a church." It's a good question with a simple answer. The difficulty is the implementation of that answer. Simply put, the church will find unity when it grounds its fellowship in Christ and nothing else. Church's that seek unity around anything or anyone else is doomed to squabble and fight. It's easy for church's to build their identity on a common social class, a monolithic ethnic identity, a certain political platform, or a favorite staff member. If the church builds its community upon these foundations, its destined to crumble and divide. The one and only foundation for the church is Christ! Any other foundation is seeking sand! So how do we find unity as a congregation? We build our identity as a covenant people together on the gospel.

But *how* do we build our church on Christ and the gospel? There's many ways to do this, and it should be the aim of all we do in our life together. We center our live together on Jesus. We have Christ-centered preaching and teaching, Christ-centered friendships, Christ-centered prayer, and Christ-centered singing. In other words, we focus our attention only upon Jesus. However, there is one means of grace that we often under emphasize and under utilize as a way to center our congregations identity on Christ, and that's the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper was given to us by Jesus to unify the church. You don't take the Lord's Supper with your immediate family around the dinner table. You don't take it among friends or at a conference. Rather, it is the church alone who leads in this ordinance, and the church takes it together. The Lord's Supper isn't an individual activity, but a corporate one. As we rehearse the Gospel together, we insist that our unity come in the Gospel. As we eat the bread and drink the cup, we

declare to one another that *this* is what binds us together. As we come to the table in remembrance of Christ, we declare together that we might not have much in common, but *what we do* have in common is Jesus. Thus, the Lord's Supper becomes a unifying act, a time to repent of skirmishes with other church members and bitterness against one another. As we partake of this supper, we remind ourselves of the unity we have in Christ. The Lord's Supper should be taken regularly to habitually remind ourselves that our identity as a church is in Christ alone.

Third, the Lord's Supper *proclaims* the truth. In Paul's instructions on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:26 he tells us, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." The Lord's Supper is an evangelistic act. As we eat and drink we declare to the world that Christ has died and he has resurrected and is coming again. The act itself makes the gospel explicit. Only when we take Jesus for ourselves, can we receive salvation. The Lord's Supper is a visible act that pictures our faith in Jesus. As we take the Supper we declare that Jesus is our only hope in life and death. He alone has covered our sins, and he alone is the Christ who will come again for his church.

Jesus gives us the Lord's Supper as a gift for the good of our souls. It's an act that helps us rehearse the gospel; it unifies the church; and the Lord's Supper proclaims the truth to the world. Some argue that we shouldn't take the Lord's Supper too frequently lest it lose its meaning. However, why do we say that only when it comes to the Lord's Supper? If this is such a good gift given to us by Jesus, why shouldn't we enjoy it each week? Why would we neglect it? Preaching, prayer, and singing are all good gifts for the building up of the church, just as the Lord's Supper. Yet, no one makes an argument that we should only have preaching quarterly so that it doesn't lose its meaning. Again, we have no

immediate plans to revise the frequency in which we take this supper as Forest Hills, but I hope in the future we will think carefully about our time of worship together, and utilize this blessed ordinance more frequently for the building up of our church.

3. You Need Christ's Sacrifice (26-31)

Immediately after this Passover meal, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn together and went out to the Mount of Olives. There Jesus tells them that, in fulfillment of the Scriptures, the shepherd will be stricken and the sheep will be scattered. Peter, with great confidence, says, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." Then Jesus foretells his denial, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."

You see, we need what the Lord's Supper represents. We need Christ and his sacrifice. No matter how much we may think we can serve and follow Jesus on our own, we are bound to fail in our own might. Just as Jesus uses the passover meal to teach the disciples what his death will accomplish, by foretelling Peter's denial he instructs us on why we need his death. Our hearts are disloyal to the Lord. As sinners, we will fail the Lord. We will soon see Peter's denial, despite his confidence here. However, we like Peter need a savior.

Thankfully, that is just why Jesus came. The Lord's Supper encapsulates the Gospel. Jesus' body will be broken and his blood will be poured out for you! It is through his death, that we receive life. Jesus is the true passover lamb, who

protects us from the carnage of death. Because of Jesus' work, we can receive eternal life. No matter your sin, no matter your failures, no matter your denials of Christ, he remains eager to receive you dipping the morsel of bread and handing it to you in friendship and forgiveness. Both Judas and Peter would fail Jesus in a big way and sin against him. One many would humble himself in his failure and seek forgiveness. The other would harden his heart and hang himself in resistance. You may have failed Christ greatly, and your life may be toxic in sin. Yet, Jesus is willing to receive you and forgive you. Humble yourself, turn from your sin, and trust in Jesus. Eat of his flesh. Drink of his blood.

When the body of Christ gathers to take the Lord's supper, they proclaim the Lord's death until he comes, and we await in eager longing for the day when we will drink it anew in the kingdom of God with Jesus at the head of the table. At that great day, will you be found around that table? Only those who eat and drink of Christ today in faith, will eat and drink with Christ in eternity.