

Hope Christian Church
Todd Cravens
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Sermon Series: *The Gospel of Mark*

What is the Lord's Supper?



Mark 14:12-25 (ESV)

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¹³ And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "*Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him,* ¹⁴ *and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'* ¹⁵ *And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us."* ¹⁶ And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

¹⁷ And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "*Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.*" ¹⁹ They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" ²⁰ He

said to them, *"It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. ²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but 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."*

²² *And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ 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."*

Introduction

Last week after the service someone asked me a question about the way in which we celebrate the Lord's Supper here at Hope. It occurred to me that I have never preached a sermon explaining what the Lord's Supper is and what it means. The thought occurred to me, "Perhaps I should think about preaching on the Lord's Supper." So, in my heart, I began praying about this.

Then later I sat down to continue reading the Gospel of Mark where Herb left off in his preaching last week. And it just so happened that the very next portion of Mark was focused on the Lord's Supper. I took that to be an indication that the Lord wanted me to preach on the Lord's Supper.

What is the Lord's Supper? Why do Christians all over this globe regularly gather to celebrate this ritual? What does it mean? Who should we receive it?

One Event Referred to by Many Names

Christians often use different words to refer to this uniquely Christian observance. Protestants refer to this as **The Lord's Supper** or **Communion**. It's called the Lord's Supper first because it was instituted at a supper between Jesus and his disciples, and second, because that is what Paul called it in his letter to the Corinthians. It was falling under abuse in the church in Corinth and Paul wrote to correct them.

1 Corinthians 11:20 (ESV)

²⁰ *When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.*

It is often called **Communion** because Paul goes on to describe that what takes place in the Lord's Supper is a means of real, spiritual communion between Jesus and his followers who participate in it.

1 Corinthians 10:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ.*

Anglicans refer to this event as the **Eucharist** because of the Greek verb (*eucharisteō*) for 'giving thanks' in Mark 14:23.

Mark 14:23 (ESV)

²³ *And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it.*

This is particularly noteworthy for the cup refers to Jesus' blood which he claims represents the beginning of a **new covenant between God and man**. The emphasis is placed upon the blood because through the blood the new covenant blessings were purchased for the believer.

Roman Catholics refer to this as the **Mass**, which comes from the concluding words of Latin liturgy, *Ite, missa est*, which means "Go, you are dismissed."¹ All four of these terms, communion, Lord's supper, eucharist, and mass, are simply different terms which refer to one event. It would be another sermon entirely to explain the difference in understanding between different denominations of what exactly is believed to happen in this event.

This is an issue of such significance that not only have the people of God divided over this issue, they have even killed over this issue. During the final four years of the reign of Queen Mary I (1555-1558), known as Bloody Mary, 288 Protestants were burned at the stake. One was an archbishop, four were bishops, twenty-one were clergymen, fifty-five were women, and four were children. What was the reason they were burned? They were not burned because they were thieves. They were burned because of what they did not believe happened in the Mass.

The doctrine in question was the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Did they, or did they not believe that the body and blood of Christ were really, that is, corporally, literally, locally, and materially, present under the forms of bread and wine after the words of consecration were pronounced? Did they or did they not believe that the real body of Christ, which was born of the Virgin Mary, was present on the so-called altar so soon as the mystical words had passed the lips of the priest? Did they or did they not? That was the simple question. If they did not believe and admit it, they were burned.²

I am happy that we do not live in such days as these just described. However, the reason people were put to death for what they believed is because they believed that something massively significant took place in the Lord's Supper. We live on the other end of the spectrum. We may be guilty of believing that nothing more significant takes place in the Lord's Supper than the simply ingesting juice and crackers. The Lord's Supper is not mere juice and crackers.

¹ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 859.

² J.C. Ryle, *Light From the Old Times* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2000, first published 1890) available at <http://www.biblestudytools.com/classics/ryle-light-old-times/why-were-our-reformers-burned.html> accessed 4 April 2014.

So what is it? What is the Lord's Supper? From our text this morning we can learn several things about the Lord's Supper that will help us more fully understand and appreciate all that it is intended to signify.

The Lord's Supper is Historical

The first observation we can make is that the Lord's Supper is primarily historical. It's roots go back to the Exodus from Egypt and the celebration of Passover.

Mark 14:12-25 (ESV)

¹² And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³ And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵ And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." ¹⁶ And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

As we follow Jesus through the events of the final week of his life, we find ourselves on Thursday of that week. This supper that Jesus was having with his disciples that night took place at Passover. Passover was the annual feast which commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from the curse of the angel of death who was commanded to take the life of every first-born in all of Egypt, both of man and beast. Only those who were inside a house covered by the blood of the sacrificial lamb were passed over by the angel of death and had their lives spared. Those who were not under the blood of the lamb were not spared. There was not a single house in all of Egypt that did not experience the death of someone in their family on that night.³

Israelites were commanded to make a pilgrimage annually to Jerusalem to observe Passover and to remember the night that effected their deliverance from the brutally harsh life of slavery they had endured in Egypt. God did not want them to ever forget that night. Jesus and his disciples had gathered in obedience to God's command to remember that night, that historical night that had taken place so very long ago. The roots of the Lord's Supper are historical and they go back to Egypt and Passover.

The Lord's Supper is Solemn

Not only was it an historical night, it was also a solemn night. The Passover recalls the incredible power of God. He holds the life and breath of all men in his hand. He blesses those who love and obey him while he curses those to ignore and defy him. One cannot remember

³ Ex 12:30.

the joy of the deliverance that night brought to the house of Israel without also remembering the grief and anguish that night brought to the house of Egypt.

The mood of Jesus turned solemn also as he spoke of the things that were yet to happen that night. He spoke of betrayal and of the horrible judgment that would befall the one who betrayed.

Mark 14:17-21 (ESV)

¹⁷ And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." ¹⁹ They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" ²⁰ He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. ²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but 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' betrayal would lead to Jesus' death. This night would be very dark indeed. The blackness of betrayal would only become darker as betrayal would lead to the further blackness of death. However, as we have repeatedly seen, this betrayal was no shock to Jesus. He knew his Bible and he was well aware that all that would unfold was part of the divine plan for his life, including the betrayal. "*The Son of Man goes as it is been written,*" meaning that the betrayal of Jesus had long ago been prophesied. Judas' betrayal threw no wrench in the night, but simply fulfilled all that God had spoken of beforehand. That night was a very solemn night.

The Lord's Supper is Symbolic

Not only is the Lord's Supper solemn, but it is also symbolic. Jesus' death would not therefore be a cause of perpetual mourning, but would give way to great joy for Jesus himself would become, for all those who would believe, the Passover Lamb who would take away the sins of many. The apostle Paul wrote, "*Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*" (1 Cor 5:7). Jesus would symbolically become the sacrificial lamb that would save all who would come under his blood. How? By offering his own body as a sacrifice for many.

Mark 14:22-24 (ESV)

²² And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

The disciples would have understood Jesus to be speaking symbolically, about his body and his blood. It is inconceivable to believe that the disciples would see the bread and the wine before them and understand them to suddenly become the physical extension of the Jesus

himself as he sat there speaking to them. Jesus was offering them a visual illustration of what was about to take place.

As he took the bread and broke it and passed it to his disciples say, "Take; this is my body," they would have clearly understood him to be using the bread as a symbolic reference to his body which was about to be broken for them. Similarly, with the wine, as he poured the wine and passed it around, he said, "This wine is the symbol of my blood, which represents a new covenant that will be poured out for many." Jesus is using the physical realities in front of him, the bread and the cup, which can be seen to explain spiritual realities, which will not be seen, when he shortly offers up to God his body and blood.

Today, we lay these same physical realities out before us, the bread and the wine, in order to be reminded of the actual transaction that took place in the spiritual realm when Jesus willingly offered himself up as the Passover Lamb—the lamb whose blood would cause the wrath of God against our sins to passover us and spare us, since it landed on Jesus, who stood in our place on the cross.

The Lord's Supper is Communion

Not only is the Lord's Supper historic, solemn, and symbolic, but it is also communion. It is an occasion for real spiritual communion with Christ. Jesus was consistently clear about one uncomfortable truth: there is no eternal life with God apart from believing and receiving the spiritual life that is found in him alone. Jesus said this one day as he taught in the synagogue in Capernaum:

John 6:48-59 (ESV)

⁴⁸ *I am the bread of life.* ⁴⁹ *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.* ⁵⁰ *This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.* 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."*

⁵² *The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"* ⁵³ *So Jesus said to them, "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."* ⁵⁹ *Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.*

To explain that Jesus was not advocating cannibalism, he went on to say,

John 6:63-64 (ESV)

⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.

Spiritual life comes not from eating the physical body of Jesus, for his body is right now seated at the right hand of God the Father and “the flesh is of no avail.” Spiritual life comes by believing that Jesus himself is the source of spiritual life and coming to him in faith expecting that he will give it to those who ask him.

The Lord’s Supper then is coming to Jesus by faith that, just as bread and wine give strength to our bodies, so will Jesus through our faith and our coming to him, give us strength in our spirits and in our soul. Just as coming to the breakfast table will satisfy the physical hunger of our bodies, so will coming to Jesus in faith to the communion table satisfy the spiritual hunger of our souls. Jesus and Jesus alone is the bread of life. Whoever continually feeds on him, abides in him and he in them. There is a real spiritual communion that takes place when the people of God come to him in faith to satisfy their every hunger and thirst. The Lord’s Supper is a living parable of this truth.

The Lord’s Supper is Commanded

The Lord’s Supper is historical, it is solemn, it is symbolic, it is real spiritual communion, and it is commanded. Jesus commanded his followers to regularly do this.

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 (ESV)

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Jesus commanded his followers that they should regularly take the bread and the cup and remember him, his sacrifice, his broken body, his poured out blood, and remember that it was these things which purchased the new covenant the—new covenant that would supersede the old, the new covenant that would do all that the old covenant did not do. He did not command it to be done with a specified frequency, but he simply said, “as often as you do this,” do it in remembrance of him. He commanded this ceremony and his followers must obey.

The Lord’s Supper is Proclamation

The Lord’s Supper is historical, it is solemn, it is symbolic, it is real spiritual communion, it is commanded, and it is proclamation. The Lord’s Supper proclaims a certain message.

1 Corinthians 11:26 (ESV)

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The message that is proclaimed in the Lord's Supper is first that we cannot save ourselves. We need an innocent lamb to die in our place in order for our sins to be taken away. Jesus is our Passover Lamb. He is our substitute. Secondly, we proclaim that we are personally exercising our faith in Jesus. No one else can believe for us. No one else can drink this cup for us. We must chose for ourselves whether or not we will put our faith in Jesus. Thirdly, we confess that our sins are so sinful that there is no atonement for them apart from death. Someone must die if we are to life. Passover tells us that there is a curse and a lamb must die if we would live. Fourthly, we proclaim that faith alone in Jesus alone is the way of salvation alone. Jesus alone rose from the dead, therefore he alone is the one true messiah uniquely anointed by God to be the means of salvation. This is what we proclaim in the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is Celebration

Not only is the Lord's Supper, historical, solemn, symbolic, spiritual communion, commanded, and proclaimed, but it is also a celebration. There is a solemn aspect to the Lord's Supper, but do not miss the final words Jesus spoke to his disciples.

Mark 14:25 (ESV)

²⁵ 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."

Jesus finishes what he explains about the Lord's Supper by looking forward to a grand celebration when he will drink it new in the kingdom of God. This no doubt is the marriage supper of the Lamb spoken of in Revelation.

Revelation 19:6-9 (ESV)

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

"Hallelujah!

*For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.*

*⁷ Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;*

*⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure"—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

⁹ *And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."*

This is also seen in the parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22:1-14, which we do not have time to explore. That Jesus is planning a supper for which he awaits the arrival of all of his children, should cause our hearts to leap up at the thought of participating in such a wondrously glorious table. Jesus has accomplished salvation of those who will believe in him. His blood was poured out for many. Are you among the many? He is forgoing celebration now until the fullness of God's kingdom comes at the end of the age and all his elect children have been gathered from the four corners of the earth (Mk 13:27). The Lord's Supper is a mighty reminder that there is a promise of a grand celebration that is open to all who will believe it and receive Jesus as messiah and Lord.

Who Should Participate in the Lord's Supper

This brings us to one final question. Who should participate in the Lord's Supper? The clearest answer to this question comes from simply observing those to whom Jesus offered it. Jesus invited his disciples to join him in this supper. So ***only those who are disciples of Jesus should participate in the Lord's Supper.*** The Lord's Supper is not for those who are not trusting in Jesus for the salvation of their souls.

Furthermore, those who are his disciples and are walking with him should participate. If you are his disciple and you are not presently walking with Jesus, then do not participate. If you have offended Jesus in some way, then your communion with him will not be sweet. Abstain until you know you are right with him.

Paul call for self-examination before receiving the Lord's Supper.

1 Corinthians 11:27-30 (ESV)

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.* ³⁰ *That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.*

Participating in the Lord's Supper in a disrespectful, careless, thoughtless, unworthy way was the reason some people in Corinth were weak and sick, and Paul said some of them had even died because of their attitudes towards the Lord's Supper. No one who is living in a consistently sinful and rebellious pattern of living should receive the Lord's Supper. Come not to the Lord's table if you are continually and repeatedly looking to sin to satisfy your desires. As Paul says,

1 Corinthians 10:21 (ESV)

²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

Neither should you receive the Lord's Supper if you are in a present state of unresolved conflict with someone else here in the church. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul instructs against receiving the Lord's Supper without "discerning the body." The context indicates that interpersonal relationships must be right before participating in the Lord's Supper. We find a similar admonition in Matthew.

Matthew 5:23-24 (ESV)

²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

There is something powerfully wonderful about the Lord's Supper, but it is not merely juice and crackers. If there is unresolved tension between you and anyone, then go first and address it before receiving communion.

Regarding children, only children who have not professed faith in Jesus should receive the Lord's Supper. This table is only for those who are disciples of Jesus. If your child has professed faith in Jesus, and is able to understand the gospel and has confessed his or her sins, and you see fruit of the Spirit, then your child may receive the Lord's Supper. But if not, then tell your child no and explain that this is something that should be waited for and can be received after they understand the gospel and who Jesus is.

The Lord's Supper is historic. Its roots go back thousands of years to Egypt and to that first Passover.

There is also a very solemn aspect of the Lord's Supper. It took place on a night that he was betrayed. That betrayal led to his death.

It is also symbolic. His body was broken for our sins. His blood was shed for our iniquities. By his stripes we are healed. He was our lamb. He died for us so that we might live.

The Lord's Supper is also a real, spiritual communion with him by faith as we go to him to satisfy the hunger and thirst of our souls.

It is commanded. Jesus commanded us to do this in remembrance of him.

The Lord's Supper is also proclamation. It is a proclamation of the gospel—that Jesus died so that all who put faith and trust in him, might live and not die. He died so we could live.

Finally, the Lord's Supper is celebration. It is a reminder that the victory has been won. The battle is over. Jesus is risen and is preparing a place for us even right now. He is setting the table and waiting for his last elect child to make it him before kicks off the celebration. There is a mighty banquet awaiting all who eagerly look forward to seeing Jesus.

If you are one of his followers, then come to the table, but if not, then stay at your seats. Be before you leave, talk to one of us about your relationship with Jesus.