

Jason Upchurch - Mark 14:22-25 - The Good News of The Lord's Supper - Part 2

We come again to this passage about the Lord's Supper. And I've mentioned this before but there are few areas in the life of the church that my views have changed as much as in the Lord's Supper. From what it is, to how often we partake, to what we use when we take.

I have to say that the average baptistic church has such a low view of the Supper that there many people really view this portion of corporate worship as a unnecessary or even problematic. I know pastors who struggle with how to even fit it in to a service because it could take upward of 5 minutes on a Sunday. And do we need to do this since we talk about the gospel and sing about the gospel anyway?

I grew up in a church that celebrated the Lord's Supper once a month, in the evenings, and it was all over in a few minutes. And I can't remember any time that my church actually taught us anything substantial about what we were doing.

The first thing that changed in my understanding of the Lord's Supper is how central it is in the life of the church. You read the book of Acts and it says the dedicated themselves to 4 things: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread - the Lord's Supper - and prayers.

And as I thought about that passage I thought: if we only do this once a month are we really dedicating ourselves to it? If I go to the gym once a month, am I really dedicated? Of course not.

The early church took every Sunday and all through the week as they gathered together with the apostles. So once a week is the minimum the church should do this.

Then I was convinced we should use wine. That's what was used by Jesus, the apostles and the whole wide world until prohibition in the 1800s. The argument against it was that someone who was a drunkard might come to church, taste the wine and go into a raging alcoholic binge and fall away. And we don't want to stumble that person so I guess we can never touch alcohol again. That really is the argument that is given in almost every church that only uses grape juice.

It's not a biblical argument at all, it's an argument to abstain from a command based on the off chance that someone might stumble for coming to church and doing what Christians have always done.

If someone is tempted into a raging drunk because he sees someone else drink a thimbleful of wine, they are not filled with the Spirit and need to repent and trust Christ anyway.

My son asked me last week that if it should be wine, why do we have juice in the middle? It's a great question. The answer is that if someone is with us who was formerly a drunk and has made some kind of an oath to never drink alcohol again we want to make room for them. Also if someone is a visitor and has never taken wine at the Supper, we would rather them take and work out details later rather than potentially violate their conscience even as they worship the Lord.

We want to be as charitable as possible to those whose conscience might be weaker in this area. If you take the juice, that's just fine. We have it here for you.

Interestingly, when we started RBC we had no idea how this would work out. So put out about 50/50 wine and juice. And amazingly 90-95% people took the wine. And the ones who took the juice weren't offended at the wine drinkers. The big deal that people had warned about for decades turned out to be absolutely nothing..

Another interesting note is that usually the pushback against doing the Lord's Supper weekly is that it will become just routine and dry and unimportant. They don't say that about singing songs or preaching or any other aspect we do each week. Just communion for some reason. But when we celebrated our 1 year anniversary as a church someone made a video of people talking about the thing they liked best about the church. And the number one thing was weekly Lord's Supper.

Now we don't do something just because it's popular or whatever. But I think it's interesting that the one element people always said would be routine was the one most beloved.

Now, when it comes to the Lord's Supper know that there have been a lot of trees killed arguing for different positions about what it is and what it means.

And on a more serious note there have been a lot of blood literally shed over what the Supper represents. There's a lot of theology being represented when we gather together. And people have warred over that theology for years. Sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse.

We began our study of this passage last week and this week as we look at the Lord Jesus turning the Passover into the Supper, we're going to see the theology of the Supper. This morning, we're going to look at just 2 issues that will take up all our time.

- 1) What does it mean "This is my body/blood?"
- 2) What does it mean drink new? **Read 22-24**

1) The body and blood. What does Jesus mean when he says this? And why does it matter? The short version is he means "This represents my body."

I don't think we are to take this literally as in the elements are literally now the body and blood of Jesus.

Jesus said in his ministry: I am the light/door/shepherd/way and many others. We don't believe that Jesus is an actual door. Or that he truly watched over sheep. These are figures of speech to give us an idea about what he represents.

In the same way, Jesus was sitting right there with the disciples in the flesh and he said this is my body and blood. Jews didn't eat human flesh or any kind of blood. Since there's no push back here it seems pretty obvious they knew he was saying "this represents my body and blood."

Now, let me go on a little bit of a journey here because it's important to know what the Bible does and does not say about this issue.

There are basically 4 main views about what happens at the Lord's Supper.

- 1) Transubstantiation
- 2) Consubstantiation
- 3) Memorial
- 4) Spiritual Presence

The Catholic view is transubstantiation. What does that mean? Trans means to change. Substantiation means substance. So the Catholic view means they believe the cracker and wine turn into the actual body and blood of Jesus. They take the words of Jesus literally.

They believe that what actually happens in the Lord's Supper is that these elements miraculously change into Jesus's literal body and blood. And - this is where it gets rowdy - if you don't believe that, you are condemned to hell. That's the official Catholic position.

Council of Trent. 13th Session, Chapter 1, Paragraph 1:

In the first place, the holy Synod teaches...that...the holy Eucharist ...is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things...He [Jesus] testified, in express and clear words, that He gave them His own very Body, and His own Blood; words which, recorded by the holy Evangelists, and afterwards repeated by Saint Paul. ...it is indeed a crime the most unworthy that they should be wrested, by certain contentions and wicked men, to fictitious and imaginary tropes, whereby the verity of the flesh and blood of Christ is denied...these inventions devised by impious men; she recognising, with a mind ever grateful and unforgetting, this most excellent benefit of Christ."

I don't know if you got that, but basically in the elements, Jesus is truly present. And if you deny that you are wicked and impious. That's you and me. That's the official teaching of the Catholic Church.

Now, here's where it gets even crazier. Because they believe that this is the real body and blood of Jesus, they also believe that what happens at the Supper is that Jesus is resacrificed every week in every Catholic Church. His blood is literally shed again. And his body is literally broken again.

Do you know why they call the leaders in the Catholic Church priests? What did the priests in the OT do? They sacrificed for the people. Catholic priests, according to Catholic theology, continually sacrifice Jesus for the people.

Council Trent.

"...this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the mass...that this sacrifice is truly propitiatory and that by means thereof this is effected, that we obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid, if we draw nigh unto God, contrite and penitent, with a sincere heart and upright faith..."

Did you get that? The mass is truly a sacrifice which truly affects propitiation. When they take the Supper - the Mass - really salvation is conveyed, real mercy because it's really Jesus who is being sacrificed.

Council of Trent: "For the victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of priests, who then offered Himself on the cross, the manner alone of offering being different...Wherefore, not only for the sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities of the faithful who are living, but also for those who are departed in Christ, and who are not as yet fully purified, is it rightly offered, agreeably to a tradition of the apostles."

It's saying Jesus is being truly sacrificed. The only difference is that there is no cross on which he dies. The manner is different - but the victim [Jesus] is the same. And, I don't know if you caught this, he dies for us over and over and he dies for the dead over and over. The dead who are not in heaven but are being purified. Where's that? It's in their false doctrine of purgatory.

Listen, I put my foot in my mouth last week when I accidentally called them brothers. They're not brothers if they believe Rome's doctrine. Because every part of their theology is connected to some other part and the whole thing is basically tainted.

Jesus was crucified once for sins - that's it. Then he sat down. There is no more ongoing sacrifice. The sacrifice is done and has been presented.

In fact, the argument of Hebrews is that we know that the OT sacrifices didn't actually get rid of sin precisely because they had to be offered over and over. If you have to keep doing it it doesn't work.

Jesus died once for sins and rose again. He is not continually sacrificed at the Supper and neither is his body really and truly present here.

Side: You know the phrase "hocus pocus that magicians use?" It's when something magical happens. The bunny comes out of a hat, the handkerchief disappears. Many people believe that phrase came from the Catholic Mass when the priest says "This is my body in Latin" it's "Hoc est enim corpus meum." It sounds like hocus pocus. Like something magically changes.

I think we can concede that taking "this is my body" to mean it actually becomes the body and blood of Jesus is the most literal way to understand the passage, but it's clearly not what Jesus meant.

So we reject transubstantiation.

2) We also reject a view called consubstantiation. Con means with. SO this view is that the body and blood of Jesus are "with the elements."

This was a view held by Luther. He rejected transsubstantiation but still thought something special was happening in the meal. He said that Jesus was truly present “in, with and under” the elements.

Luther's Smaller Catechism: Q: “What is the Sacrament of the Altar? It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself.”

Augsburg Confession: (foundational confession of the Lutheran Church): “Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present, and are distributed to those who eat in the Supper of the Lord.” (Cited from Grudem, Systematic Theo.)

So although the actual elements - bread and wine - don't turn into Jesus, Lutherans still believe the actual body and blood of Jesus are present with the elements. “In, with and under” they would say.

The common illustration is a sponge and water. When you're washing dishes the sponge doesn't turn into water, but water is present in, with and under the sponge. In the same way, the elements don't change, but the true body and blood is somehow actually present with the elements.

To be quite honest, this view is the most far fetched to me. To make “this is my body” mean that “My body is truly present in, with and under” the elements is really a stretch. Just being honest, I think transsubstantiation has more merit than this view, and I reject transsubstantiation.

3) A 3rd view is the strict memorial view. This view is the view of most baptists and probably the view of most evangelicals. And if I were to guess I think many of you probably hold this view as well. It's that the meal is simply a remembrance. There's nothing spiritually happening here at all. There is no grace of any kind conveyed, Jesus is no more present here when we take the Supper than when you're mowing the lawn or hiking in the mountains. We are simply remembering Jesus as we eat a meal together.

I used to hold this view. I think the Lord's Supper is a memorial. And I think all the views would say that the Supper is a time of memorial. Jesus, of course, says “do this in remembrance of me.” So of course it's looking to Jesus.

But I think there's more going on here than simply remembering Jesus.

4) The 4th view is called the spiritual presence view. This is the view I hold. This is not the official view of our church. The church takes no official view, but at minimum it is a memorial.

This view is that at the meal Jesus is spiritually present with believers as we take. And he's present in a special way with us when we gather as a body to remember him in this meal.

And at the meal we do receive grace. But it's not saving grace. No one is more or less saved as a result of taking the meal. But our hearts are encouraged as we see and smell and taste and touch and hear the gospel.

It's kind of like the grace you receive from reading the Bible, or being encouraged by a friend in fellowship, or singing Scripture saturated songs or when someone prays for you. It doesn't save you, but it does encourage your heart in the Lord.

So to draw it back to Jesus here: when Jesus says this is my body and this is my blood he does not mean that literally. He means it figuratively. But there is something happening at this meal that doesn't happen when you sit down for burgers or pizza on a Tuesday night.

Turn to 1 Cor. 10. I want to show you 2 things from this passage that help us understand.

Paul is making an interesting argument here that we should flee from sin. And he uses Israel in the wilderness as an example. And what he says is that there's a sense in which Israel in the OT was baptized and ate the Lord's Supper. And yet God killed many of them. Just because they got dunked and just because they ate the Supper didn't mean they were saved. But watch how he makes the argument. **Read 1-5**

The first thing Paul says is that sometimes literal food is spiritual food.

Paul says in the wilderness Israel ate spiritual food and spiritual drink. They are manna and drank miraculous water. But how was it spiritual? It was literal food and literal water. It was spiritual because God provided it. And as they ate, it had a spiritual function which was to remember that it was God who was sustaining them day by day, moment by moment.

The bread and water weren't magical, but they served a spiritual purpose beyond simply keeping bellies full. They were designed by God as a spiritual sustenance to help them be reminded of God's deliverance.

But Israel didn't recognize that. They ate and drank and then they abandoned God. **Read 6-13**

So his argument seems to be: flee from sin because just taking the elements ain't gonna save you. There was a sense in which Israel was baptized and Israel took a shadow of the Lord's Supper and many were killed by God. The same thing can happen in the NT too. **Read 11:27-32**

Remember the Corinthians were having divisions and getting drunk at the Lord's Supper? Some were gorging themselves on food while others were hungry? I think what Paul is saying is that God will kill them just like he killed Israel in the wilderness because this is a sacred, spiritual meal and the food we eat is spiritual food.

The second thing to notice in **1 Cor. 10:14-22** is that Paul says there is a spiritual communion happening when we eat the meal. **Read 14-18**

When we take the element, it's not just memorial. It's a participation in what has happened. A koinoneos. A fellowship. A communion. You know why we often call this communion? Communion is when you hang out and engage with someone. It's when you fellowship with them. When we say "communion" who are we communing with? It's with Jesus. We commune - that's the word - with his body and blood.

There is a spiritual thing going on with the body and blood of Jesus at the Supper. We commune with each other as we commune with Jesus.

And Paul says that the reason we can't eat food offered to idols is because it would be participating with the demons. Koinoneos - communing with them. Those who go to temples of idols and eat there are actually having real true communion with demons. **Read 19-22**

If you're filled with the Holy Spirit, you can't hang out with and eat with demons and hang out with and commune with Jesus.

And this is why it's called the spiritual presence view. Because we don't believe the elements turn into Jesus, but we do believe he is present with us in a special way. What is that way? We don't know exactly.

We know God is omnipresent, he is present with us everywhere. But we also know that there are times when he is especially present with us to encourage us.

In Joshua 1, the Lord tells Joshua to take courage and go take the Promised Land because "I will be with you." Well, isn't God everywhere? Couldn't he have just said "For I am omnipresent?" Yes. But there was a special way in which God was present with Joshua.

In Psalm 23 the psalmist comforts us because the Lord is with us, his rod and his staff they comfort us. How? There's a special way in which the Lord is present with his people that he's not with unbelievers.

In the middle of church discipline - one of the hardest things a church will do - God says he is with the 2 or 3 witnesses as they give accurate testimony. "For where two or three are gathered, there I am among them."

God was with Israel in the pillar of fire and cloud to guide them and comfort them, even though he's omnipresent.

There are times all throughout the Bible where God is present with his people in a special way. And what Paul is saying here is that when we take the Lord's Supper, we are communing with Jesus. We are participating with him in a special way that we don't any other time.

This meal is the closest we will get to communing with the Lord Jesus, eating and drinking, that we will have this side of glory. We partake of the table to commune - to have true fellowship - with Jesus who died for us.

There is a spiritual presence of the Lord here, that we experience only at this table. So **Back** in Mark 14 when Jesus says this is my body, I don't believe he is saying that it literally his body. I think he's saying it represents his body. But as we gather and take the elements, we are participating in a spiritual reality that encourages the hearts of Christians because our Lord is with us in a special way.

2) The second thing Jesus gets to in this passage is the drink it new. **Read 24-25**

What does this mean? It means that although we take the Lord's Supper, Jesus doesn't. At least not yet. When we take this meal we are participating in something and it should be clear to us that someone is missing.

We're down here eating and drinking and Jesus - though present spiritually - is not here physically. There's a sense in which we should want him at the table.

We've had Thanksgiving with our extended family over the years and some years people can't make it, for whatever reason. And there's always a sense of "Oh man, they should be here. They should be with us." We can call or text or FaceTime or whatever, but it's just not the same without them actually being here with us.

That's what taking this meal should remind us of. That we should be with Jesus celebrating and eating and drinking.

Life has a tendency to distract us from big eternal truths. We get bogged down in the day to day things of this world. One thing the meal reminds us of is that we should be longing for the presence of Jesus just like a family member we haven't seen in a long, long time.

There should be a longing here. A renewed desire. And there will be a time of renewal and a time where we celebrate this meal with Jesus. **Turn to Rev. 19:1-9**

This is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. This meal that we take looks back to the death of Jesus, but it also looks forward to the day when we eat with Jesus in glory. **Read 1-5**

We have this amazing scene in heaven where all the saints are falling down before the Lord. And then this is what we ultimately look forward to. **Read 6-9**

What we're looking forward to is the true feast with Jesus in the Kingdom. Where Jesus is fully with us and there is nothing but joy and gladness and rejoicing forevermore.

And listen, if you're a believer then you've been invited to this feast. You've been invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, because you are part of the bride.

You're at the main table, with the Groom rejoicing forever.

This meal reminds us of that. We look back on the death of Jesus, but we look forward to the true meal with Jesus. We take this meal as a reminder that that meal is coming.

And Jesus is looking forward to the day when he takes food with us in the Kingdom forever and ever.

Pray