

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

This morning we come to one of the passages we read often in our corporate worship: the institution of the Lord's Supper. And because of that I'm going to use my sermon to do double duty as our homily this morning.

The Lord's Supper takes a prominent role in the place of Christian corporate worship. Every church has a liturgy: a list of things they decide to do when they gather together on a Sunday morning. A liturgy isn't just the list, it's also the arrangement. What order do we do these things in?

In the list of things that are included - or not included - in a church's liturgy is usually the Lord's Supper. I mean, if you think about it: what's the difference between a Bible Study and Church? Bible Studies, have fellowship, sometimes singing, usually announcements and certainly some kind of preaching. What's missing?

It's usually that the Bible Study doesn't baptize anyone or take the Lord's Supper. There's also not usually a formal corporate structure at a Bible study. The minute you start doing the sacraments and having a formal structure, really you have a church.

John Calvin: Where the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments are rightly given, there is not to be denied that a church exists.

The sacraments and the Word properly given out are usually the defining elements of a church. And here Mark records for us the very moment when Jesus transformed the Passover meal into the Lord's Supper and into one of the foundational elements of what we do when we gather together as a church.

There is so much to say about the Lord's Supper, so let's dive in.

1) Picture of death. Read 22-24

You guys are probably worn out from me telling you this: but the Passover points to who? Jesus. A third of Mark's gospel is dedicated to Passion week. Passion week is also Passover week and so the connections the Mark makes with Jesus and the Passover are everywhere.

And Jesus makes it explicit here, Remember Passover begins Thursday at sundown, so when Jesus and the disciples are eating the supper they are eating the Passover meal. And what Jesus does he transforms the Passover celebration into a celebration of himself. This whole thing revolves around him.

Now, the Jewish celebration of the Passover seems to have been rather elaborate in Jesus's day. But we're not exactly sure what it looked like. The Jewish information about the Passover comes from almost 200 years after Jesus from a Jewish text called the Mishnah. But Judaism was radically transformed after the destruction of the Temple and so it's not clear how much of Jewish worship in Jesus's time is the same as what the Mishnah records.

In any case, at the meal there were several cups of wine, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and of course the lamb itself. Usually those at the meal would sing specific hymns throughout the night as the patriarch of the family explained to the family the Passover story and its meaning.

Here Jesus just narrows it down to 2 elements: bread and wine. And what he says is that these 2 elements are actually all about him. In fact, he says that **they are** him. We'll talk more about that later next week.

But this is actually an astonishing thing for him to say. Imagine me at Christmas time saying "Hey guys, I just want to let you in on a little something: Christmas is actually all about me. You thought it was about the birth of Jesus, it's actually about my birth and my life and you should celebrate me all the time." You'd probably stone me to death with stones.

But as the Messiah, this is what Jesus is doing with really one of the most sacred celebrations in Israel's calendar. He's saying the whole thing points to him. As Christians we don't celebrate Passover. That was a good thing for the people of God to do for almost 1,400 years from Moses to Jesus. But now as the people of God we celebrate Jesus, who is our Passover lamb.

And Jesus's specific role in the Passover is as the Lamb who **died**.

Both of the elements that we take at the Lord's Supper point directly at death. The bread is broken for us. The matzo would have been pierced to keep it from ballooning. And then it would be broken. And further, the bread is crushed in our teeth when we eat of it. It's a picture of violent death.

When the Passover lamb was sacrificed, the blood would be drained out of the animal - either goat or lamb. In fact there were so many lambs slaughtered for Passover that the blood would run down the Temple Mount into the Kidron valley below and the valley would be covered in red.

The wine signifies the blood that came out of Jesus's body in his violent death. Every aspect of the Lord's Supper is a reminder of the death of Jesus. The world considers this morbid. The earliest Christians were accused of being cannibals because we said this is the body and blood of Jesus.

But it's not morbid, for us it's glorious. Jesus died for us! This is what we love, what we rejoice in, what we invite others to celebrate with us and what we remind ourselves of.

It's the death of death in the death of Christ.

Turn to 1 Cor. 11. Most of you are familiar that this is one of the other passages we often quote when talking about the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians had really mangled the Lord's Supper to a point where it was unrecognizable. They were getting drunk, shaming each other, leaving others with no food. **Read 17-22**

This was the mess happening in Corinth. There were factions and divisions and drunkenness at the Lord's Supper. It seems that the Corinthians celebrated the Lord's Supper with a meal - something like potluck - and people were getting left out and it was just a mess.

Side: We are convinced that wine is to be used at the Lord's Supper because that's what Jesus used and has always been used. There was no grape juice until 150 years ago when it was introduced because of pressure from radical feminists to prohibit wine from the Lord's Table.

Wine is precisely what Jesus used and wine even has a theological significance. What was Jesus's first miracle? Turning water into wine. That's not random; the OT anticipated the Messiah and the NC by describing God's blessings as flowing like wine. Wine and NC go hand in hand. When we drink in the wine, the flavor and taste is designed by God to remind us of his promises and blessings.

We don't drink water or milk or honey or even beer, which was available at the time. God designed that the smell of wine and the taste of wine in our mouths and the color of wine would remind us of the NC.

And one way we know that it was wine they were drinking at the Lord's Supper is that they were drunk. It wasn't cut with a bunch of water, as many people suppose. The wine was potent enough that the Corinthians were getting drunk. It's also interesting that Paul doesn't correct them by saying "Don't drink wine anymore." No, he just tells them not to get drunk.

Wine as an element is a very important element of the Supper. You say "Well, why do we have juice here also?" Because of backgrounds and traditions we know there are some whose conscience might be offended by drinking wine or those who have never worked through this issue and we'd rather them partake than have their conscience violated. So we encourage the use of wine, but gladly make allowances for folks to work through the issue.

But the fact that these guys are drunk confirms what they're drinking. And it had gotten so bad that Paul says it's not even recognizable as the Lord's Supper: when you come together it's not the Lord's Supper you're eating.

And so he corrects them. He says this is what the true Lord's Supper looks like. **Read 23-26**

He basically repeats the words of Jesus but he adds a couple of important points. The Lord's body is given over for the believers. And the cup is to remember Jesus.

When you remember something, you look back on it. You consider what happened. What specifically are we looking back on? Paul says: the death of Jesus. **Read 26**

Every time we take the Lord's Supper we look back and forward. We look back on the death of Jesus. Paul says that we're proclaiming his death. When we all eat this bread together, drink this wine together it's a type of proclamation. It's a type of preaching. We preach to each other. We remind ourselves and others that Jesus died for us.

And we need to be reminded of that. That what we do here isn't just a club where we network and make friends - though it's good to do that.

This isn't just to hear some great music - through we should be encouraged by singing praises to God.

It's not primarily about sermons or doing good or repenting from sin. It's primarily about the death of the Son of God that was vindicated by the resurrection of the Son of God.

This is everything for us. What we're reminded of at the Supper is the heart of the gospel. That Jesus died on the cross in our place for our sins and rose again.

When you eat that cracker and drink that wine you're proclaiming your faith in and allegiance to Christ, crucified for your sins.

This is the reason only Christians should take the Lord's Supper. Because it's an ongoing proclamation of allegiance to Jesus who died for sins.

Back in Mark 14 this is the background that sets up the Lord's Supper. It's wrapped up in the Passover and specifically focusing on the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

The Lord's Supper is a picture of death.

2) The Lord's Supper is a time for thanks. Read 22

Mark says that Jesus blessed the bread. The other gospels record that he did the same thing with the wine. What does it mean to bless something? Is there something sacred that happens in a blessing?

Well, no. When God blesses us it means he gives us some good gift. When we bless God it means we thank him for that gift. And that's what the other gospels make clear: this is a time for thanking God.

The word bless used here is eulogeo which is where we get the word eulogy. A eulogy is all the nice things you say about someone at their funeral. Here, it's repeating back to God the good things he has done. And not just saying them, but thanking God for what he's done.

The word used in the other gospels is "thanks." Jesus gave thanks, which is eucharisto. Which is where we get the word Eucharist. Eucharist usually brings to mind Catholic doctrine. Usually the Catholics call the Supper the Mass or the Eucharist. But all Eucharist means is thanks. And while we reject the Catholic view of the Lord's Supper, giving thanks is good and right when we take the Lord's Supper.

Now, think about this: who is giving thanks here? Jesus is. For what? The bread and the wine that represent his body and blood.

Jesus is thanking the Father for his own death and the remembrance of his death. That's pretty amazing.

Jesus isn't dragging his feet to the cross.
He's not kicking and screaming on the road to torture.

He's not saying "Fine, I'll do it if I have to."
He's not even just willingly going to the cross out of a sense of sheer duty.

Jesus is holding the elements in his hands that represent what he's about to do and gives thanks to God.

Listen carefully: Jesus did not go to the cross for you half-heartedly. Jesus was not reluctant to die for you or for me.

Jesus was all in and he was all in with joy and with thanks to God. You say "Well, my life is a mess and I struggle with sin and I'm lazy in my devotion to God and and and..." Welcome to the club. That's all of us. That's the whole Christian team, you guys. We're all losers. That's the point of the gospel.

1 Cor. 1:20-31: God did not choose many who were wise, or powerful, or noble. He saves the lowly and base and the nothings of the world.

God doesn't save righteous people - he doesn't save those who are healthy - because they have no need of a physician. He saves the sick and weak and wretched. And he loves it. Why? Because he gets glory, and honor and praise.

The triune God saves losers because then he gets all the praise. And God loves doing this.

Heb 12:2: says that Jesus went to the cross with joy, completely disregarding all the shame of the cross. All that shame and torture and humiliation was completely disregarded by Jesus because he knew that on the other side of the cross was glory and power and joy.

We look at the cross and think: man, I'm just not worth it. And you'd be right. We're not worth the precious blood of Jesus. But there's something bigger going on at the cross - and the celebration of the cross in the Lord's Supper. **Turn to John 17:6-19**

This is also that same night: Thursday night before Jesus is crucified. This is called the high priestly prayer of Jesus. This is one of the most beautiful sections of Scripture because here we listen in on a conversation within the Trinity. Within the Godhead. Jesus is praying to the Father.

And he's talking about us. Think about that for a minute.

Have you ever overheard a conversation where people were talking about you? That could go really, really well, or really really bad.

Imagine being a fly on the wall in heaven right now and getting to hear what Jesus is saying about you to the Father. What do you think he'd say? Well, look what he says even before he dies. **Read 8-10**

Let's stop here for a minute. Do you know why Jesus loves us the way he does? Why he loves Christians? Because the Father gave us to him. We are a gift from the Father to the Son.

Theologians often call this the covenant of redemption. Over and over Jesus says that the Father gave them - believers - to him. That's why we're precious to Jesus, you guys. Not because we're so great. Not because we're so holy. It's because the Father gave us to Jesus as a gift to bring Jesus glory.

Have you ever had a family member gift you an heirloom or some sentimental gift that is precious to you? The thing itself isn't all that amazing. You couldn't go sell it on eBay or Craigslist and make a fortune. I've got some old tools my dad gave me. I think they're from my grandpa. They're not flashy or exciting. If I were at a yard sale I probably wouldn't buy them. But, they're a gift from my father and they have value beyond the metal they're made of.

In the same way, believers are a gift from the Father to the Son and we have a value beyond who we are in our sinful flesh. And Jesus isn't letting us go. Because Christians are a gift from the Father to the Son the Son loves us and will never let us go. **Read 11-19**

Jesus says "I've kept all the ones you gave me." All the ones the Father has chosen, Jesus gladly saves and keeps. And there's this time he's going to be experiencing the wrath of the Father and Jesus says "keep them safe, Father. They're precious because you gave them to me. Keep them safe." And the Father does.

And watch this: Jesus also prays for us. For you and me. **Read 20-24**

Everything that Jesus has just prayed about the very first disciples, Jesus prays for every disciple. Jesus isn't praying for the world. He's not praying for unbelievers. He's praying for us. For every blood bought believer for all of history.

The Father has given them to Jesus, given us glory that we can't even imagine. Did you notice that the Father loves us in the exact same magnitude that He loves Jesus? **Read 23**

The Father loves us with the exact same magnitude that he loves his only begotten Son.

You guys I've got a couple kids, and I'm just going to shoot you straight: I will never love you as much as I love them. I will cut you off in the blink of an eye out of love for my own.

God's love is so infinite he never has to make that decision. His love abounds all the more for ones whom he has given to his Son.

And Jesus loves us with that very same fervor. **Read 24**

If you were a fly on the wall in heaven, this is exactly what you'd hear. That the Son longs to see us. He desires us to be with him and enjoy his glory. Why? Because we are part of this eternal love gift from the Father to the Son.

We are loved by Jesus because we are loved by the Father and given by the Father to Jesus.

And how Jesus purchases us, how he obtains this gift from the Father is to lay down his life for us. That's the point of transaction. The death on the cross is the way that Jesus secures the gift from the Father.

The Father says "There's this sinful humanity who deserves my wrath and out of that humanity I've given you some who will praise you forever and ever in joy and thanks. The way they praise you, Son, is that you lay down your life for them. You die."

The Son's response? "Absolutely. Father, I'll do that with joy and with thanks."

That's deep, you guys. That's amazing grace. What happens at the cross is an amazing transaction between the Father and the Son. Atonement, propitiation, sacrifice. But it's also inheritance. Where the Son inherits the redeemed people the Father promised to give him.

When you are saved, it's not just that your sins are forgiven, though they are.
It's not just that you get to go to heaven, though you do.
It's not just that you escape hell, praise God.

But you enter into a covenant promise between the Father and the Son. That's what we are part of as the people of God. And so when we come to the Lord's Supper, and Jesus gives thanks he is thanking the Father that this eternal plan of redemption is coming to pass.

What about us? When we come to the Lord's Supper and give thanks, we are thanking God for including us in that plan. "Thank you, God, for including us in that plan."

Turn back to Mark 14.

Picture of Death
Time for Giving Thanks

3) Time for Christians to Take. Read 22

When I was in high school our church did communion once per month. It was in the evening service, which only about half the church went to on any given Sunday. And I remember the pastor telling us that before we took the elements we needed to examine ourselves.

Basically, the message was that before we ate and drank we needed to think through our lives and ensure that we didn't have any unconfessed sin from the last month. We needed to clean up our lives before taking the elements because we didn't then we were taking in an unworthy manner. And if we were to read the rest of 1 Cor. 11 that means we drink and eat our own judgment.

And the judgment can include sickness and death. And at 17 years old I didn't want to die so I spent the 2 minutes I got to hold the elements confessing every possible sin I knew in my life and hoping I was sorry enough not to offend Jesus. There were also times when I just didn't feel like I was worthy at all - usually because of some kind of sin in my life - and so I just didn't take it.

I think that scenario is common in many peoples' thinking about the Lord' Supper. But I don't think it's right. We'll unpack taking in a worthy manner next week, but suffice it to say that the context is getting drunk, having divisions, and rivalries in the church. That's the unworthy part.

Show of hands: how many of you guys sinned last week? How many will sin this week? If that's our measure, you guys, we will never be worthy to take the meal.

What we're doing when we take the meal is reminding ourselves that the death of Jesus makes us worthy. The death of Jesus rids us of all our sin. Faith in the death of Jesus is our grounds for pardon. That all the Father's wrath toward us - every last ounce - was expended on Jesus.

A couple of years ago we bought a welder to learn to weld. And you that the brightness of a welder is like the brightness of the sun. You can go blind in seconds looking at the arc. It's too powerful, too bright. So we got these helmets that autodarken and you fire up the welder and what happens is that the blinding light is shielded and you can stare directly at the brightest thing in our universe and look at it as beautiful. And actually it's rather awesome and beautiful.

What Jesus does on the cross is absorb the full fury of the wrath of the Father in our place. So that we can look on him and his glory and power, not in terror. But see God in his radiant beauty and glory.

And when we take - and we're commanded to take - we're reminded in the meal that our standing before God is not about our efforts, but about Jesus's effort.

And so what Jesus says is a one word command. What is it? "Take." Take it. Eat it.

Jesus knew that night all the disciples would abandon him. He knew the sins they would commit. He knew that even 10 years down the road Peter would functionally deny the gospel and Paul would have to rebuke him. And yet he still says "take."

And what Jesus says to the disciples, I say to you: Christian, take and eat. You need to be reminded of the gospel. That eating and drinking is not optional. Eating and drinking is God's way of reminding you over and over and over that your standing before him is secure. Not because of you. But because of him.

All of God's favor, all of his promises, all of his kindness, all of mercy, all of his strength and all of his grace that he will show you more and more for all eternity is only because of the dead body of Jesus on the cross.

Let's be reminded of that this morning.

Pray