

What Exactly is the Lord's Supper?

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[0 : 00] Well friends, I want to begin by just getting you to ask yourself what you think we're doing when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. That is, when you come to the Lord's Supper, what do you think it is that we are actually doing and how do you feel about it?

I think we all have different backgrounds and different experiences and different attitudes to the Lord's Supper. So what I want to do today as part of our series on church, worship and sacraments is to think about the Lord's Supper in particular.

This is the first sacrament. There are two sacraments. Sacraments are a visible sign of some eternal truths. The Lord's Supper is one of the sacraments and the other one, of course, is baptism. We'll look at baptism next week.

But this week I want to look at the Lord's Supper. And in order to do this, I want to give us what is effectively a biblical theology that is an overview of what the Bible has to say theologically about the Lord's Supper.

We're not going to cover everything, but we are going to cover what I think are key aspects of it. So I want you to turn in your Bibles, and there's a bit of Bible flipping today, to Exodus chapter 12.

[1 : 08] So we had that in our Bible reading, and I think the page numbers, well, perhaps it'll be up there in a moment for you to have a look at. I want you to remember the context for this particular event. You see, what has happened is God has rescued his people out of Egypt.

Well, he's about to rescue them. He's sent many, many plagues upon the Egyptians. And now he is going to send one final plague.

And that final plague is announced here in chapter 12. And you can see what's going to happen. This will be an event so striking in amongst God's people that it will be the celebratory thing that they start their year with.

This event is so outstanding that it will mark the beginning of every year. And have a look at chapter 12. It says this. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, this month will be for you the first month.

The first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel on the 10th day of this month, each man is to take a lamb for his family and one for his household and so on.

[2 : 14] And you heard the Bible reading. What they are to do is every household, and if one household is not large enough or not rich enough, you are to include other households within your household. And what happens is you are to take a lamb or a goat and you are to slaughter it.

And you are to then have a meal with it. But before you have the meal, what you are to do is you are to take a branch and you are to dip it in the blood of the lamb.

And you are to walk over to the doorpost of your house and on each side and on the lintel above, you are to paint blood. And that will be a sign that you belong to God. And then when the avenging angel comes to wipe out all the firstborn who are within the land of Egypt, only those who have blood on their doorposts and their lintels will have their firstborn spared.

You can imagine what an incredible night this must have been. You can imagine the whales that must have come up in the middle of the night from the Egyptian households. And you can imagine what the people of God must have felt as their firstborn were saved.

And that would mark out them for all of history. They would celebrate this particular event that God had spared them, that he had given a substitute for them. That substitute was a lamb.

[3 : 42] That lamb died in their place, as it were, in the place of their firstborn children. And that would mark who they were. They were the people who had been saved by God.

Now, I want you to then flip a few pages forward into Exodus chapter 24. So please go to Exodus 24. It's not that further on.

I don't have a page number, but you'll be all right. You can find it. And I want you to see what happens in Exodus 24. This is a second event. Now, just to tell you what's happened between the Passover and this event, God's people have indeed come out of Egypt.

They have been through the Red Sea. They have been rescued. They have then come to Mount... They have wandered in the wilderness for a brief time. They've come to the base of Mount Sinai.

And there on Mount Sinai, God has given his law in Exodus chapter 20. He's laid out the stipulations of their relationship, their covenant relationship in Exodus 19.

[4 : 43] And they have signed up for the deal. They have said, everything the Lord has said, we will do. And so when God has laid out what they should do, he then seals it in chapter 24.

So have a look at chapter 24. The Lord said to Moses, come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, the 70 of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance. But Moses alone is to approach the Lord.

The others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him. And when Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words, all the Lord's laws, they responded with one voice.

Can you hear it again? They did this at the beginning and they do it now. Everything the Lord has said, we will do. And Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said. And he got up early the next morning.

He built an altar at the foot of the mountain. He set up 12 stone pillars. One for each tribe of Israel to signify they're all in this together. Representing the 12 tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord.

[5 : 47] And Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls. And the other half he splashed against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and he read it to the people and they responded. Listen to them.

We will do everything the Lord has said. We will obey. There's about three or four times they've done this in four or five chapters. Moses then took the blood sprinkled and took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, this is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all of these words.

So can you see what you've got blood spilled on now? You've got blood on the altar representing God and you've got blood on the people or at least the stone pillars of the people that possibly is being meant.

And you've got them saying we together are bound together. These sacrifices have shown that we are in this together, God and the people.

And this makes a covenant. We are now in relationship. We are in covenant. So what have you got in Exodus 12 and in Exodus 24?

[6 : 51] You've got we are God's people rescued because of the deed he's done. We're bound together with each other. And now we're in a covenant relationship with God bound together with him in covenant because of what he has done.

And because of the words he has given us that construct that tell us what our relationship is to look like. Now, with that in mind, I want you to go to Luke chapter 22, our second reading for today.

Luke 22 verses 7 through to 38. And I want you to just think and see if you can note some of the words that you've some of the things that you've heard from Exodus.

So please go with me to verses 7 through to 38. We've just got some introductory verses first. And then we move on.

22 7. And it came to the day of unleavened bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. And Jesus sent Peter and John saying, go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.

[8 : 03] So what are your first words that you remembered? The first things that you recall? There's chapter 12 of Exodus, isn't it? And where do you want us to prepare it? They asked. He replied, as you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you.

Follow him to the house that he enters and say to the owner of the house, the teacher asks, where is the guest room that I might eat the Passover with my disciples? He will show you a large room upstairs or furnish make preparations.

They left. They found things exactly as Jesus had said. And they prepared the Passover. When the hour had come, Jesus and the apostles reclined at table and he said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

So do you see the context? I'm about to suffer. This is what is about to happen. I want to celebrate this Passover with you. And then he says, for I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

So let me let me just ask the question, what do you think this particular meal means for Jesus? This meal means he is about to suffer.

[9 : 06] This means he's about to die. This means this meal is, as it were, a physical representation of what is actually to happen to him. And then what does it mean for the disciples?

Well, at least one thing it means here is verse 16. Can you see it there? For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds its fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

For one, it means that what happens to them here will be repeated. It means there is a future for them. But let's see what else it means. After taking the cup, he gave thanks and he said, take this and divide it among you.

For I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. Again, what does it mean? It means not only suffering for Jesus, but it also means the beginning, the entering into the culmination of the kingdom of God.

That's where it will end up. And then he took some bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them saying, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

[10 : 13] And in the same way, after the supper, he took the cup saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Let me tell you, it's the only time I can find in the Bible that that phrase from Exodus chapter 24 is repeated.

It's in the Lord's Supper. So can you see what's happening? A new Passover and there is a new covenant. That old Passover had a sacrifice attached to it. So does this one.

The sacrifices of a lamb, but this time the lamb of God. This new, new event. Also, this new covenant. Covenant has a covenant attached to it.

It is bound up with covenant. It is a new covenant. And it is a covenant that also has blood shed for it. And also, did you notice it binds everyone together?

Just like the old one did. It is something that is community oriented. It is about the whole people of God. So this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

[11:16] But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with me, mine on the table. The son of man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to the man that betrays him. And they began to question among themselves which of it it might be.

And then I want you to notice what happens. See the next incident. A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest. And Jesus said to them, the kings of the Gentiles lord it over them.

And those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. Now I want you to notice what's going on. You see, Jesus has said, new Passover, new covenant.

My blood is to be shed. This is to be remembered by you corporately. He has given them a level playing field, hasn't he? They are all together there on the same basis.

And do you notice what they do immediately? They start working out in that new arrangement who's better and who's not. Who's greater and who's lesser. You see, though he has leveled the playing field for them and he has said, you are all in this together.

[12:19] You are all there on the same basis. They want to work out who's on top and who's not. So what does it mean for the disciples? It means they have had someone die for them.

It means they are in a new covenant. It means they are related to each other by this particular event and bound together with each other. Now with that in mind, I want to just ask, what is all of this that Jesus says about remembrance?

What is it to remember? Well, when you remember the Passover, do you know how you remembered it? You did it every year, year after year after year. And the Jews had a great way of remembering.

You see, they didn't just sort of sit down there once a year and just think, oh, yes, I remember something happened. No, what they did is they reenacted it. A physical remembrance.

And that often happened. That is, they did something. You see, remembering for Israelites is not just something you do with your brain. It is something you do with your whole being.

[13:19] And you enter into it. And the way you did it, if you're an Israelite, is you slaughtered a lamb. You painted your doorposts and lintels. And you had a meal together.

And you actually sort of almost reenacted it. And that's what Jesus is asking. He's asking them to do that sort of Jewish thing. To when they come together to celebrate this Lord's Supper, as they will, they are to remember, not just cognitively, but with their whole being, what has been done.

Now with that in mind, I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 11. So first, sorry, 1 Corinthians 10 verse 14. Therefore, my dear friend, says Paul, flee from idolatry.

I speak to sensible people. Judge for yourselves what I say. Now this is a bit to look at very carefully. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ?

And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all share in the one loaf.

[14:28] Now, friends, we've lost a bit of this because we have sort of now individual cups often. And we have individual little bits of bread. But you imagine if it was originally the Lord's Supper, originally in a meal context, can you imagine what would be doing, what would be done?

What would happen is at a particular point in the meal, you would take a bread. You know, think Lebanese bread, to give you an example. You know, one large piece. And you'd rip it. And then you'd take a piece off.

And you'd pass it around. And they'd take a piece off. And they'd take a piece off. And they'd take a piece off. What are you saying? We are one bread. But we are individual parts.

And we're all part of the one. And see, that's what Paul is trying to say here. He says, is not the bread we break a participation in the body of Christ? A fellowship with Christ.

You see, every time we break that bread, we're saying we're one in this together. This binds us together. We belong to each other. And then the next thing you do is you pass around, not individual cups, but one cup.

[15 : 35] And you pass it around. And each would take a sip. And you drink from the same amount. And so he says, and because we are one loaf, we who are many are one body. For we all share the one bread.

And he talks about participation in the blood of Christ. We fellowship in the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ binds us together. Can you see what's going on here? The Lord's Supper is as much about the horizontal, about our relationship with each other, as it is about the vertical.

And to see this in action, turn on to chapter 11. So we're going to look now at chapter 11. And I want to tell you, first of all, what I think is going on here. I want you to imagine this is a lounge room, a big lounge room.

And we're having, it's not got pews in it. It's just got chairs randomly scattered around. And we're all being told we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper today.

Now, the Lord's Supper in those days was a meal. Now, I want you to imagine that about this middle block here, they're rich.

[16 : 42] And these side blocks here, they're poor. And the rich people in the middle, sorry, there's no, you know, it's entirely random here. But imagine that the rich people, they bring in all their goodies from home.

You know, all the good food, probably some good wine. And they have their own little groups here. And they share all their food and their wine together. And the poor people out on this side, they don't have much food.

They don't have perhaps any wine at all. Perhaps just a little. And over here, these people are having a party. Over there, these people are just watching.

Okay. Now, how would you feel? That's what's happening, I think, something like that in Corinth. And look at what Paul says. So have a look at it.

He says, so following on from, so verse 17, he says, In the following directives, I have no praise for you.

[17 : 49] For your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you. And to some extent, I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

So then, when you come together, it's not the Lord's Supper to eat. And now he's going to tell them why it's not the Lord's Supper. For when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers.

And as a result, one person remains hungry. And another gets drunk. Can you see what's going on? Non-verbally, there's an immensely powerful bit of communication going on in this congregation.

You've got one group of people here partying on, eating much, getting drunk. Another group of people who can't afford it, who are going hungry, watching on.

He says, that's not the Lord's Supper. Can you see it? He said, this is not the Lord's Supper. Look at it. Verse 20. So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat.

[18 : 54] Why? Because the Lord's Supper not only considers your relationship with God, but your relationship with each other. And non-verbally, you're denying that you are related to each other with one body. It's as though you've torn the loaf in half and you're not giving half to someone else.

It's a denial of everything that the Lord's Supper represents. And look at how he goes on. So that, I think, is what's going on. And then Paul says what he received from the Lord.

He said, for I received from the Lord, verse 23, what I also passed on to you. The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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. In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me. It's almost, it's the closest version to this is Luke's version, which we read earlier on in the Gospels.

And he says, for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. So, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

[20 : 11] And what is it to eat it in an unworthy manner? It's to not understand your relationship with God, not repent of your sins, but it is also to not understand the horizontal, to not understand your own relationship with each other.

And if you don't understand that and you don't live that, it is not the Lord's Supper you are celebrating. It is something else. It is eating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.

And so he says, so everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup. And what ought they to examine? I think, examine your relationship with God. Yes, how you stand with God and that this event of Christ's death that you're remembering has affected your relationship with God and binds you together with him.

But it also binds you together with a group of people. And you're to remember that as well. And you're to see if you're in right relationship with your everyone else. And if you're doing this sort of thing, you know, the one group eating, one group not.

Then that's not. That's not doing the Lord's Supper properly. It's not eating it in a worthy manner, is it? And so he says, for those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ.

[21 : 22] Now, that's not the bread, is it? No, that's not the bread. That's the body of Christ, which is the church. And so if you eat the bread without discerning the body of Christ, without understanding your relationship with each other and without living in right relationship with each other.

Can you see what he's saying? Eat and drink judgment upon themselves. Now, friends, that is very, very sobering, isn't it?

And then he says, that is why many among you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep. This is a relatively rare statement in the New Testament where you are actually given a reason why some people are weak, sick and dead.

Because asleep is a euphemism for dead in the Lord, as it were. It's an incredible thing, isn't it? If you do not discern the body of Christ and your relationship with God rightly, it may be that God may judge you.

So do it carefully. Do it very carefully. Can you see the implications, friends? The Lord's Supper must be remembered for what it is.

[22 : 34] Not only a demonstration of all that God has done for you in Christ, but a demonstration also of your relationship with each other. It is where we together say we are in this together.

We together are God's people and we must live like that. So let me just summarize. What is the what is the Lord's Supper all about? Well, one thing it's about is looking backward.

It's about it's looking back to what God has done in sending his son into the world to die for us. So it's looking backward. Second thing we heard from Jesus about looking forward as well, isn't it?

It's about looking forward to that time when all the saints of God will meet in the presence of God and of his son and eat another meal. A spectacular meal beyond all meals.

A meal of great celebration in the presence of God himself. And Jesus will eat with us. So it's looking forward to that great end time. But also it's looking around.

[23 : 37] That is, it's looking around at who we are part of. And it's saying, how can I minister to those around me?

How can I love those around me? What is wrong in my relationship with those around me? So, friend, if you come up here personally, privately up to the Lord's Supper and you take a piece of bread and take a piece of wine and remember and drink some wine and remember that Christ has died for you.

And a living out of relationship with a fellow Christian. It is a lie. You think, oh, I can, I'm really secure and I love having my relationship with God, but I couldn't care less about my neighbor.

That's wrong. And God says, you're asking for judgment. Should you live like that? So it's looking around. But it's also more than that.

It's about gratitude, fear and penitence. It's about saying, God, thank you so much for all that you've done for us in Jesus. This is an incredible event. It's about fear.

[24 : 43] It's about realizing that this celebrating the Lord's Supper is a very sobering thing to do and ought not to be done lightly or carelessly. But it's even more than that.

It's something you must approach with penitence. It's something you must approach with penitence. Repenting. Repenting. Repenting. Of sin before God, but also repenting of sin with your neighbor. But friends, something I'd suggest you do.

If you're coming to the Lord's Supper and you're out of relationship with a brother or sister, do not take the Lord's Supper without a determination to sort the relationship out. And you know, churches are terrible at this because often you will see within a church relationships that have been fractured for year after year after year.

And those people will celebrate the Lord's Supper together every time. That's a lie. Says the apostle. So, and finally, it's done without superstition.

Friends, I think there's lots of superstition about the Lord's Supper. Lots of things that, you know, you feel if you don't get it, there's going to be something wrong. Lots of superstition as to what it actually accomplishes.

[25 : 50] Friends, think about it in terms that are real. It's about looking back, looking forward and looking around. And if you like, looking up as well.

It does all of those things. So let's determine when we celebrate the Lord's Supper here that that's what we're going to be doing. If you listen to the prayer book, it will often give all these warnings. You might like to look up in the prayer book.

It's about page 108 where a warning is given before the Lord's Supper. And it captures all this stuff from 1 Corinthians. Have a look at it and let's look at it, read it, take it on board.

But look at these passages again and take them on board. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your son, Jesus Christ.

Thank you that he is the Passover lamb. Thank you that he laid down his life for us. That he was a substitute for us.

[26 : 56] Thank you that because of what he's done, we are bound together in a new covenant with you. A covenant where there is forgiveness of sins and no remembrance of them.

Thank you that we are bound together with each other for we jointly are inheritors of this. Father, please help us to live before you as those who are in right relationship with you.

And to reflect that in our love for each other. We pray that particularly for us here at Holy Trinity and for this congregation. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.