

The Last Supper - Remembrance Service

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Preacher: Richard Honeysett

[0 : 0 0] Okay, thanks everybody. Sorry, I got you started and then cut you short. You can carry on afterwards.! It's great to see you. It's really inspiring, wasn't it, to hear those stories of those guys who've come to faith.

That was a real perk this morning to hear of that, so thank you very much for sharing that. I'm going to start with a question this morning. Does what we believe automatically influence our actions? Does what we believe automatically influence our actions? You would think so, right? So I believe that this building is built quite securely, so I'm prepared to hang out in it for a couple of hours on a Sunday morning.

If I think that swimming is an important life skill, then I'll get my kids to go to swimming lessons to learn swimming. Makes sense, right? If I'm American and I believe that Donald Trump is the best leader, I'm going to vote for him, right?

What about us as Christians? Do the beliefs in our head automatically transfer to our hearts and then subsequently into our actions, which then shape our characters?

[1 : 1 0] So we believe, I think, that God is sovereign, but do we genuinely trust him with every aspect of our lives? Or do we live with some deep fears about the future?

We might believe that we're completely forgiven in Christ through his death, but perhaps we might continue to live as if we're guilty.

And we might believe that God loves us despite our faults, but do we in turn then just love others despite their faults? If you're like me, there can sometimes be a sort of frustrating disconnect between our beliefs and our thoughts and actions.

So how do we overcome this as we live as followers of Jesus? The Bible would say that there are what's called spiritual disciplines that help us with this. So we listen to God's word and his voice speaks to us through the pages of the Bible.

We encounter God as we pray to him, as we worship him, and as we serve him. So spiritual disciplines kind of take our head knowledge and move it to our heart, and then it shows itself outwardly.

[2 : 2 7] But I think there are also Christian practices. And one of those practices is the observing of the Lord's Supper. Communion, which I think has the power to shape us and to change us.

And this is the meal that we're looking at today in the series on Meals with Jesus. If you remember, as we've gone through this series, we've seen Jesus dine with those considered outcasts.

We've seen him use mealtimes to teach repentance and forgiveness. He's used the feeding of the 5,000 to show that he satisfies all of our needs.

And he's used mealtimes, I think, to demonstrate the values of God's kingdom. But this meal today is different. It's different because it kickstarts a weekend which turns history on its head.

It's different because the meal on offer is completely unique. And it's different because we get a seat at that table today by the grace of God.

[3 : 3 8] And I think that the reason why the Last Supper, when we partake of it, can change us and shape us as we eat it on a relatively regular basis is because it connects us to the past, it binds us to God in the present, and it points to our fulfilled future.

We call it communion, common union. It connects, it kind of binds us, it secures us. So firstly, it connects us to the past.

So Remembrance Sunday, and one more as well, thanks. Remembrance Sunday takes us back to the past as we paused and we just remembered those who've given their lives for our country. And as we take communion, we're transported back to the night when Jesus ate and drank with his disciples the night before his death.

And it was a really tense evening. Jesus is in Jerusalem. His popularity has grown and the crowds are lapping up his teaching. But we know if we look at verse 2, it says that the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. There's this dark threat at hand. And if you flick back a bit further to the end of the previous chapter, chapter 21, verse 37, It says, Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives.

[5 : 18] You see, those crowds were his best protection during the day. And in the evening he could slink away outside the city walls, maybe staying in a small house and keeping a low profile.

But this evening he's inside the city walls. And as such, there needs to be a plan so this meal can take place uninterrupted. But added to that threat, there's a threat from within.

Judas, the disciple, has been primed and bribed to find the right moment to hand Jesus over to the authorities. It's a dangerous time. Let's read from verse 7.

Then came the day of unleavened bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover. Where do you want us to prepare for 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 where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?

[6 : 26] He'll show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there. They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

So Peter and John are sent ahead. There's this kind of cryptic sign. There's a man carrying water. There's a secret room upstairs. And the scene is set. Now, it seems to me that the writer, Luke, is very keen to stress that this meal happened during Passover.

I think it's mentioned five or six times in just a few verses. It's obviously significant. The Passover meal was and is for Jews still today an annual event that remembers an act of liberation as God brought his people, the Israelites, out of slavery in Egypt.

And the family meal is at the center of the festival. And the menu is pretty much fixed. Unleavened bread, bread without yeast. Bitter herbs, wine, a few other bits and bobs.

And at the center, roast lamb. And the reason for the lamb is to symbolize the final way in which God made Pharaoh's heart relent and release his people.

[7 : 39] You might remember that game of tug of war that Pharaoh tries to play with God. Yes, the Israelites can leave. No, they can't.

Yes, they can leave. No, they can't as each plague hits Egypt. But the final plague is the most devastating. The death of the firstborn sons.

And God tells the Israelites through Moses and Aaron to take a lamb to kill it, to smear some of the blood over the sides and the tops of the door frames and feast on the lamb together.

And that night, as the Lord carried out his judgment on the Egyptians, he passed over the Israelite houses, leaving those families intact.

It's the blood of the lamb offering protection, rescue, salvation for the Israelite families as they took shelter under it.

[8 : 40] And that was the first Passover. So the timing of this meal with the disciples is important. So Jesus and his disciples, they would have celebrated Passover before.

But they knew the customs, the way it worked. But this night was different. During this meal, Jesus does something outrageous.

And he turns Passover on its head. Verse 19. He took 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. He doesn't look to the past and remember the forefathers and say, The bread of our affliction that we ate in the land of Egypt, which is what is normally said at Passover.

Instead, he moves the disciples' gaze from the past to the present, beyond the food, to him.

[9 : 45] Jesus becomes the meal. This is my body broken for you. This takes Passover to a whole new level.

What is he saying? What is he saying here? Well, it might be helpful to think of what he's not saying first. Jesus is stood in the room.

His body is literally there as he is breaking the bread. So he's got to be talking symbolically. I think it's a picture in the same way that he's talked to his disciples at other points about him being the good shepherd or the vine or the door.

But what he is saying is that he needs the disciples and us to remember what he's about to do. His body is about to be broken in the most harrowing way.

He's going to head from this room to the Mount of Olives, where he'll be betrayed, sent to a mock trial, and then to the cross. But what he's about to achieve there, dwarfs in scale, what those little lambs achieved back in the Exodus.

[11:02] There won't be blood on the doorposts, but on the cross. The sacrifice of those lambs saved God's people on that particular night. But they pointed to a greater salvation and a greater saviour.

And Jesus at this meal, all these hundreds of years later, says, it's me. My death is the climactic event to which everything has been moving.

I'm going to deal with the two biggest issues on this planet, sin and death, once and for all. And to use the language of the Exodus, he's going to deliver us from them.

See, the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament, he got this, he understood this. Writing about 700 years before Jesus' death, he saw firsthand, really, the sin of the Israelites.

And he wrote these words. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

[12:11] And as a sheep before his shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

And John the Baptist understood this too. When Jesus approached him, right at the start of his ministry, he saw him and said, look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He knew of Jesus' mission, his identity, his purpose, his destiny, right from the start. The true Passover lamb, who through his broken body makes us clean.

This meal connects us to the past. There's a direct connection between us eating this bread in 2024 and the events of that Thursday night.

And as we eat bread together in just a few moments, we're going to look back and say, Jesus, thank you. Thank you that you went through the horrors of the cross for me.

[13:16] Thank you for your obedience to God the Father when you said, not my will, but yours. Thank you for your forgiveness.

If we come to communion and we're struggling with doubts, the cross reassures us that we're loved. If we come and we're kind of plagued by comparing ourselves to others and thinking we're never good enough, the cross shows us that we're valued.

And if we're prone to a sort of subtle sense of pride that creeps in about what we've achieved, the cross humbles us. This is my body given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. But this meal, I think, also binds us to God in the present. As we take communion, we are in the privileged position of enjoying what Jesus calls here the new covenant.

Look at verse 20. In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

[14:54] Covenant is not really a common word today, is it? You see it in legal documents? Like Johan can tell you all about that. It's an agreement. It's a promise.

God promises a new deal here for those that have messed up the old one. The old covenant, or promise, established under Abraham and then Moses, was a blessing for the people of Israel. It provided them laws and the promise of spiritual and material and even military blessing if they obeyed those laws.

The covenant provided priests to represent them in God's presence, and there was a system of sacrifices for them to remain in relationship with him. But it was never meant to be permanent. The book of Hebrews calls it a copy and shadow of what is to come. And the prophet Jeremiah, helpfully, explains to us in his book what was to come.

[15:56] This is what he says. The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, declares the Lord.

This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time. I will put my law in their mind and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor or say to one another, know the Lord, because they all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. And this is what Jesus ushers in on this very night.

The new covenant, it kind of moves the external to the internal. As we come to Jesus, God moves those laws from, I don't know, tablets of stone to our hearts.

[17:03] And he changes our hearts to receive them gladly, if never perfectly. He adopts us into his family, it says. We become his children.

We won't need to be instructed to know God, because he makes himself known to us in Christ. And he'll not only cast out our sins, he says, but he will remember them no more.

The new covenant brings about a new relationship with God. We're reconciled to him permanently in the closest of friendships.

How? His blood poured out for you. This meal brings the new covenant into play and means that as we come to communion, we are connected to the past, but we're bound to God in the present too.

As we eat the bread, as we drink the wine, God is making himself accessible to us. And as such, we can bring our lives to him as we take the bread and the wine.

[18:11] We've got the opportunity to thank him for what he's made possible. We get to thank him for our forgiveness. We get to celebrate our adoption into his family with other believers. We get to feast on the relationship we enjoy with him.

Do you get to the point sometimes with communion when it can sometimes feel a little bit ritualistic, a bit kind of procedural, a kind of worst, a sort of tag on to the end of the service?

If so, look at these words of Jesus. Feast on these words of Jesus. God has created a new covenant, a new promise for you to rest in and to marvel at.

At communion, we have the privilege of engaging with him personally and collectively at a deep heartfelt level as we take the bread and wine.

He knows our hearts. There's no secrets. And he desires that relationship with us. And then lastly, I think communion also points us to our fulfilled future.

[19:23] Verses 15 and 16. And he said to them, When you look at this meal and what's about to happen to Jesus over the next 24 hours, for I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

When you look at this meal and what's about to happen to Jesus over the next 24 hours, we can think about this meal as being about endings. It's called the Last Supper, after all.

We end up thinking about last meals for prisoners on death row. But Luke makes it clear that this meal is about beginnings. What Jesus is initiating here is a meal that will point the disciples forward. It will help them look to the future with a sure hope. And it will fuel them as they step out and serve him and take the gospel to the nations.

And Jesus says here that whilst we are to take communion on a regular basis as his followers, he will not take it again until it will be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

[20:42] In the passage about communion in 1 Corinthians, Paul puts it another way. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

And what then? Well, we get a glimpse, I think, in Revelation. And I think Johan mentioned this a couple of weeks ago. Towards the end, we read, Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

This is where our salvation lamb, Jesus himself, says, I'm making all things new. Jesus will bring a supper like no other supper.

Not only will it be a feast, but it will be in the new heavens and the new earth, where every longing that we have unfulfilled right now will be fulfilled in Christ, will be completely full.

Communion here on earth is the starter. The main is yet to come. And Jesus at this meal says, I am devoted, I am unconditionally committed to getting you from here to there.

[21:55] Have you ever been in a situation where there's a celebration meal that you're having? Maybe it's Christmas time. Let's imagine it's Christmas. And you've kind of prepared this feast.

And you've got family, friends coming. They're traveling a long way. And then you get a message through that says, Oh, we're going to be delayed. The traffic's bad. You've all been there. What do you do?

You wait. Yeah? You turn the oven down a bit. Keep things warm. But you wait. Maybe eat a few Pringles to keep you going. But you wait.

And then the feast begins once the guests arrive. And this is Jesus. He's paid for everything for you. He's set you free from the burden of your sin. He's prepared an eternity for you. And he's waiting there to feast with his friends. And I think if you're listening and you find that hard to believe, look at what he says to his disciples during the meal.

[22 : 55] In verse 15, he says that he eagerly desired to eat this meal with them. Eagerly desired to eat this meal with them. And if you look ahead in this passage, you'll see that there's a disciple here that's about to portray him to the authorities.

If you look at verse 21, there's about to be a squabble amongst them about who's the greatest.

Verse 24. And another disciple in this same chapter will shortly deny any knowledge of Jesus.

Verse 57. But he loved them. He eagerly desired to be with them and to eat with them before he went to the cross. You might be thinking that there's no way that Jesus would accept me.

But look at this lot, seated around this table, full of floors. He eagerly desires to know you, to forgive you, and to feast with you.

And I think if you're believing in Jesus, but you're frustrated that your actions don't always reflect your beliefs, at this last supper at communion, remember his sacrifice in the past, and embrace the relationship that he offers you now.

[24 : 16] And look forward to being completely fulfilled in the future. And I think the change will begin to come. Let's pray.

Father God, thank you that at this meal you ushered in something completely new, radically new, that Jesus offered us himself, his body broken for us.

Father, thank you that in true obedience, he then went on to have his body broken. Lord, we want the death of the Lord Jesus to not just save us, but to truly shape us.

Help us now as we come to the table to bring our lives to you, knowing that you take our worst and you give us your best. Thank you.