

# Table of Grace

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[ 0 : 00 ] few years ago going to a butcher in East Van, just on the drive there, and to buy some nice cuts of meat. And it was a halal butcher. So I went in and I said to the guy, do you serve Christians?

And he turned around with a big smile on his face, and he said, of course. He goes, Jews, Muslims, Christians. If there's one thing that we can agree on, it's the importance of the table. And I mean, he's right in that there is something in the way we are made up, something in our hearts that recognizes that shared meals are incredibly important things. They say something about who we are. They bind people together. They do something that goes beyond just filling our stomachs.

And it's why they play significant roles in important events in our lives, like a wedding reception. Now, if we just finish with the wedding, we have this reception afterwards, right, which is like this, yeah, we're getting married into a community with the support of a community.

And more applicable, obviously, to our passage here, there is the Jewish people would remember great acts of God through special meals. And in our text today, the meal is the Passover.

But before we get there, just a quick overview of the passage. So it starts off with Jesus organizing the Passover meal for himself and the disciples. Then they eat together. And then Jesus brings this shocking revelation that there's a betrayer in their midst. And lastly, the last supper. All right, a short preamble. You probably recognize those words in the passage, right? This is my body, etc. From the communion service. I think you guys would know that communion has been something that Christians have historically had arguments about. And some people in history have thought getting the meaning of communion right was so important it was worth dying for, which meant that other people thought that getting the meaning of communion was right was so important it was worth killing for. So the church has sometimes made doctrines around the Lord's table into a weapon for murder, defellowshipping people.

[ 2 : 17 ] Thomas Cranmer, who wrote the Book of Common Prayer, it's a lot of thinking about communion. And in the 39 articles, which is the it's Anglican thought and theology, which is just good Orthodox Christian thought and theology, sort of summed up in 39 short paragraphs. And Cranmer dedicated a number of them to communion.

And he did this, and some of the things he said were in direct contradiction to the elaborate medieval Catholic teaching of the day. Stuff that was it was getting stuff out of the text that wasn't there.

This we're talking about around sort of the 1500s. Let me give you an example of that. Folks, reach for your BCP. All right, we're going to have a look. We're opening this bad boy up.

Here's a test. Here's a test. What, for the Regent grads, what are the three formularies of Anglicanism? Jordan Senna.

39 articles, which is the little summary of theology. The ordinals, which are the ordination services. And I guess it's just the rest of it, like the BCP, the Book of Common Prayer. Yeah, absolutely.

[ 3 : 33 ] Which is the major chunk of it. Morning prayer, communion, etc. Okay, so the 39 articles, summary of theology, right at the back of your BCP. Go to page 710.

This is fun. Is this fun? This is quite funny. 710. All right. Top of page 710.

It's flying over from the previous page. This is article 28 of the Lord's Supper. That middle paragraph there. Transubstantiation, which is the belief that the bread and the wine actually literally turn into the physical body and blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine in the supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy writ, it's the Bible, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of the sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.

So, as a result of saying things like that, Cranmer and many others were burnt at the stake. I read a primary source account of his death, and it was very moving.

[ 4 : 44 ] Apparently, the night before he died, he recanted these things. Obviously, in a moment of weakness, terrified of dying. He said, no, no, no, I didn't mean it.

I didn't mean it. Like, no, you're absolutely right. In the morning, he recanted his recantation and was killed. Now, the account of his death said that he was so grieved by his backtracking the night before that this is what he did.

And here is a, I'm just going to read a little short piece of a first, an eyewitness account of the recording of his death. Here we go. And yet again, he required of him, the he here, so he's walking to the place where he's going to be burnt with some fries, and they'd keep going to him, come on, come on, mate, recant, recant, recant, right?

And yet again, he required of him to agree to his former recantation. And the bishop answered, the bishop is Cranmer, the bishop answered, showing his hand, this was the hand that wrote it, and therefore shall it suffer first punishment.

Fire being now put to him, he stretched out his right hand and thrust it into the flame and held it there a good space before the fire came to any other part of his body.

[ 5 : 57 ] Where his hand was seen of every man sensibly burning, crying with a loud voice, this hand hath offended. As soon as the fire got up, he was very soon dead, never stirring or crying all the while.

Hmm. So it's serious business, right? It's serious business here. There are a wide variety of beliefs about communion and I think a lot of confusion.

And perhaps when I talk about it tonight, I'm talking into a vacuum. Perhaps you've done it for a long time and haven't really thought about what it means. So tonight as we look at the passage, I want to present you with what I think is the classic Protestant position on communion, which seems to make the most sense of what the Bible says about it.

So I'll do that and then end with a bombshell about the passage, not nothing's happening in my life. All right. Mark 14, 12 to 25.

It'd be helpful if you grabbed your Bibles. And on the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, the disciples said, where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?

[ 7 : 14 ] So last week I talked about this feast celebrated Israel's freedom from slavery. You know the story in Exodus. Moses went, the Israelites were slaves. Moses went to Pharaoh, let my people go.

Pharaoh said, no, God sent plagues, death eventually was sent by God to the Egyptian households, but passed over the Jewish ones, hence the Passover.

You remember this from last week. So a passage that the disciples are wanting to know. So in our passage, the disciples are wanting to know, okay, Jesus, what are we going to do about Passover? It's a really big deal. We do it once a year. This is a big deal. Where are we going to have it? Verses 13 to 16. 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.

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? I wonder if that sounds familiar to you at all, that little scenario there.

[ 8 : 14 ] You might remember it from a few chapters ago when Mark arrives in Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. It's called the Triumphal Entry. And let me read about how he gets that donkey. Now, when they drew near to Jerusalem at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, go into the village in front of you and immediately as you enter it, you'll find a colt tied on which no one has ever read.

If anyone says, why are you doing this? Say, the Lord has need of it and we'll send it back here immediately. It's got a similar vibe and in fact, one of the sentences is exactly the same. This is a constant melody as we head into the cross and the melody is this.

Jesus is in control. He is in control of the situation. Some liberal theologians will say things like this, that Jesus started something which he could not control and he was killed as a result.

That is clearly not the case. Mark is making sure we understand he was in control. He went to the cross absolutely willingly. The second little episode here, verses 17 to 21, is about betrayal.

And just slide your eyes over there. So they're having a nice dinner and Jesus tells them that a betrayer is in their midst which is obviously, it completely killed the mood and everyone's like really sad and they're saying, we see that in verse 9, is it me?

[ 9 : 40 ] Is it me? Am I going to be the one that betrays you? And in a sense, yes. In a sense, it's actually all of them. I mean, Judas is the sort of acute betrayer.

But you see in verse 23 there, you see it says, they all drank it. Talking about the wine. That all word has echoes later in the chapter when it says, they all fled.

They all fell away. Everyone around that table let Jesus down. And Jesus knows this. He knows that he's sharing this table, this last supper, with traitors and cowards.

And that is in stark contrast to Jesus who has resolutely set his mind to go to the cross. And it serves to highlight the glory of Christ and our great need for his grace.

Now what else does this tell us about the gospel? It says that at the table that Jesus invites us to, this table is not for good people. It's a table for people who need rescue.

[ 10 : 58 ] It's a table for people who need forgiveness. I hope that's reassuring to you. Verses 22 to 25 is the last supper.

Do you see how everything at this point just kind of slows down? Do you remember right at the start of Mark?

You would remember. It's really great sermons. Who preached the beginning of Mark? I think it was you who preached the first chapter maybe? There's a lot of like, and immediately this happened.

And then suddenly this happened. And immediately this happened. Jesus is, and then this and this. These huge big events. Bam, bam, bam. One after the other. It's like a runaway freight train.

And here, everything just just slows right down. He blessed it. He broke it.

[ 12 : 06 ] He gave it. I walk really fast. And I was walking with, who was it, with you the other day, right?

And with Michelle. Michelle is back from California. Lovely to have you back, Michelle. And we went for like a coffee and I'm walking and then you had to say to me, Aaron, please, would you please slow down?

And I get that a lot. I walk really fast. I like arriving places. And I've got, I've got this, a daughter's two and a half. And so she's old enough now where I can take her for walks to the park.

And we have a park about five blocks away. And the first few times I took her there, very frustrating. I just, I just want to get there. She's stopping and looking at stuff. And now, I've learned to slow down.

Because she has little legs and she has this wonderful curiosity. So she'll just stop. She'll take like two little steps and then just stop and then just kind of look. She'll see an ant, right?

[ 13 : 04 ] Wow. It's like, it's a little friendly ant. Where's its mummy? You know, and so I have to make up a story. The mummy's been kidnapped or something. And like, I don't know.

I've never said that. But you know, like you make up a, you make up a story, you know, and where's its friends? Oh, they're over there in their little ant house and stuff. So it takes like, maybe like half an hour, 40 minutes to walk like five blocks.

And I've begun to really appreciate it because you, when you slow down, you notice so much more. And it causes you to reflect greatly in what's happening around you.

And I think this is what Mark is doing because he says such profound things with such simple words. This is my body.

It's going to be broken. I give it to you. So let's talk about this a little bit more. But let me, first of all, we'll talk about it kind of like at this level, a high level first, okay?

[ 14 : 05 ] So what's happening here is Jesus is, is, is, is taking the Passover meal and he's reinventing it. He's imbuing it with new meaning.

He's, I mean, he's actually replacing it. Yeah, I mean, he's essentially replacing it. Okay, a few more details. So, so it's probably helpful to know a bit more about Passover meal.

So the Passover meal had a special order to it. Specific foods were laid out. Each one had symbolic, each one had symbolic meanings. Where's Ubi? Ubi, you have, do you have a sata meal at your house?

Yeah? So, so, so there's, so the kids asked, did you ask your, like four questions? Ask four questions of the father. Father, father, why is it that on any other night of the week we can have any herbs we like, but tonight we have bitter herbs?

You know, so there's like, some of the foods are this. Lamb, which represented God's, in order for death to pass over the Jewish households, the Jewish people sacrificed a perfect lamb and they spread its blood over, over the doorway.

[15:17] So the lamb represents that, represents the, the freedom, the cost of that freedom. Bitter herbs represent the bitterness of slavery because they were slaves in Egypt. The fruit, what's the fruit mix called?

Do you remember? The fruit mix, the stuff that represents, it represents, it's like a, it represents mortar, it's like a puree thing, right? It represents the mortar and the bricks because the Israelites were set to work making bricks and so the father, kids would ask these questions and the father had an opportunity to kind of like, tell the family about the, the essential story of salvation for the Jewish people.

Yes? Is that a fair assessment? Okay, that's a fair assessment though, right? Okay, so it is a symbolic meal and it's a symbolic meal that called the participants to remember the following things, God liberating from slavery, rescue from death, a rescue that came through sacrifice, through blood, freedom and new life.

So, I mean, that's the gospel. So it makes sense that Jesus would use this meal and then sort of imbue it with new meaning. Now, what does Jesus say when appropriating this meal?

It says, verse 22, he took the bread and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to them saying, take this is my body. So the bread symbolizes his body. This broken bread symbolizes my brokenness.

[16:42] Broken body. I'm giving it to you. It's for you. That's the common sense meaning. The same with the wine. This is my blood of the covenant which was poured out for many.

Poured out. Poured out is an Old Testament phrase. It means violent death. Jesus is saying, I'm going to die a violent death but not a meaningless death. It recalls Exodus 24 when Moses seals the covenant with his people, with God and he sprinkles the blood of the sacrifice.

on the altar and on the people. So in Exodus, the blood was to atone for the sins of the people and it's the same with Jesus. The last part, truly I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

So the meal points them to the future and it says there is going to be a new kingdom. A few ideas to finish here.

One, the bread and the wine are symbolic. They do not become the body and blood of Christ. It's a popular doctrine but it's wrong. They do not take, it doesn't take seriously the symbolic meal that communion was based on.

[17:54] I don't think Jewish people believe that the lamb at their Seder meal today actually becomes the lamb that was sacrificed thousands of years ago. In the Old Testament, there was an Old Testament law against drinking blood and the disciples there don't seem to protest at all the fact that, so obviously they understood that it was a symbolic thing.

So I think the common sense interpretation is it's, these are symbols. These are symbols. It doesn't take away from the glorious truth.

It doesn't take away from the amazingness of the Lord's table but they are symbols. Cranmer says this, he goes, Jesus can't have meant this is my real body when it was his real body holding it.

I think that makes sense. Okay, two, it's okay to have mixed emotions or no emotions when you take communion. Sadness maybe. You might be sad as you remember the great sacrifice of Christ. Joy as we celebrate this amazing covenant with God and joy as we think about the future that Christ has brought for us.

[19:04] Christ returned the heavenly blanket. But don't get too caught up on the emotional thing as you experience communion. What I mean is that if you go up and you have a mystical experience that's wonderful.

If you don't that's okay. It doesn't have to be a mysterious thing. It doesn't have to be like this freaky thing that you feel in order for it to be real, in order for it to build faith, in order for it to be profound.

So, take the pressure off yourself. Three, why do this at all? Why do we bother? Well, firstly, Jesus said we should do this.

We should have communion together. Secondly, it builds our community, brings us together. That's why we use the common cup. It's a symbol of our community, right? Communion is not just you and Jesus.

You do this in the context of a community. Thirdly, it accomplishes something. Communion actually does something. when we preach, we make the gospel audible.

[ 20 : 11 ] When we take the sacraments, we make the gospel visible. We make it tactile. Our senses get involved. It stirs up our faith.

We get this fresh grasp on an amazing truth. We are forgiven. We are restored. Christ will come again. Packer, who's an amazing theologian and attends this church, he says, as we go up to communion, we should say in our hearts, as sure as I see and touch and taste this bread and this wine, so sure is it that Jesus Christ is not a fancy but a fact that he is for real and that he offers me himself to be my savior, my bread of life, my guide to glory.

Now, let me drop a bombshell. This passage is not about communion. So I've slightly cheated but I wanted to talk about it because communion does happen in the passage and we never get to talk about what it means and it makes sense that we talk about it because we're having communion tonight and I want you to go up understanding what's going on.

The big idea here though is not folks, we've just started, we've done the first communion, check it out, you know, here's what you say, et cetera.

It's not the big idea of the passage. It's not the main point. Mark's telling of the Last Supper is different from the other big one like Luke and that in Luke there are the words of institution which is do this in remembrance of me.

[ 21 : 52 ] There is no do this in remembrance of me here. In Luke's gospel it's like here's what we're doing, here's some meaning, keep doing this which is why we do it now.

And Mark, it does not have that. So Mark is taking our attention away from the supper to direct us to something else. Don't get me wrong, communion happens in this passage, it's just not the main focus.

So what is as we finish? What is the main focus? Do you see there in the passage Jesus says truly I say unto you He says that twice.

When Jesus says that it's a big deal. The first is in verse 18 Truly I say to you one of you will betray me. Second time verse 25 Truly I say to you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink of it new in the kingdom of heaven.

So Mark's concern here is this Jesus is going to die as a result of that betrayal and He is preparing His disciples for that. The word prepare four times in the passage.

[ 22 : 58 ] One of you guys is going to betray me. I am going to get killed as a result of that. That's the first one. Jesus suffers at the hand this is a big theme in the rest of 14 Jesus suffers at the hand of His betrayers of His friends of His enemies and eventually at the hands of God on the cross.

But here's the beautiful thing about this. He does it for those same people. Those people who betrayed Him the enemies who hated Him His friends who abandoned Him He does this for them. If you feel like you've betrayed Christ you're the person Jesus is after. I mean it's such a beautiful contrast right?

The despite our treachery He is faithful. Okay so that's the firstly true one of you will betray me. The second one I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the day that I drink it anew in the kingdom of heaven. Death is not the final word. There is life ongoing for Christ for us in the new kingdom.

[ 24 : 21 ] We place our hope in such fragile things. If I could just get this job if I could just find the perfect person to marry or be my boyfriend or my girlfriend if I could just gain weight lose weight if I could just be in this circle we put our hope in such fragile things.

This is where you should put your hope. This is where hope should reside in your heart that Christ has come and Christ will come again and He's preparing a banquet for us.

Amen. Amen. Amen.