

Session 2

THE LAST SUPPER

Luke 22:14-23; 1 Corinthians 11:27-32

Memory Verse

And he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”²⁰ In the same way he also took the cup after supper and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

– LUKE 22:19-20, CSB

The Last Supper

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The Lord's Supper is to be observed as a remembrance of Christ's death to confirm the faith of the saints and to bring to mind all the benefits of Christ's death.

? What's the longest you have ever gone without food?

? What were the circumstances surrounding this situation? How did you feel? What did you finally eat?

We need food. We enjoy food. Food can be a hobby, but the bottom line is that we must have food to live. If you have ever gone without food for any length of time, you have no doubt experienced things like dizziness, headaches, weakness, stomach pains, and tiredness. Isn't it amazing how quickly our bodies begin to betray us if we don't provide the sustenance they need to function?

Just so, our souls need nourishment. If we don't feed our souls with the sustenance they need, then we will experience spiritual weakness and lethargy. The Lord has provided several sources of nourishment for our souls. Daily worship through Bible reading and prayer are critical. Gathering together with the saints to sing, pray, and receive the Word is a central avenue of nourishment. Also, the Lord's Supper has been given to us for the strengthening of our faith and the nourishment of our souls. Let's consider together how the Lord's Supper accomplishes that in our lives.

Session Summary

The Scriptures teach us how we are to approach God in corporate worship. We are told explicitly what to do. Consider, for example, when a child sees something on the kitchen counter that looks interesting. His curiosity is piqued, and he would like nothing more than to get his hands on it and see what it does. Now, this is when the idea occurs to him: “Well, my father never said that I couldn’t play with this.” In this scenario, the child justifies his actions based on the fact that he has never been explicitly prohibited from something. The lack of prohibition, for him, is tantamount to permission.

This line of thought is something that Christians must be wary of as they consider how they ought to worship God when the church gathers together for formal worship. Christians are on safe and secure ground when they stick to activities that have been explicitly commanded in Scripture. One of the activities that God has positively commanded in Scripture is to observe the Lord’s Supper. Let’s look at the Scriptures together to gain a better understanding of this ordinance.

1. The Significance of the Supper (Luke 22:14-23)

All Christians should gather together in their local assemblies to eat the bread and to drink of the cup in grateful reflection on Christ and His death. The Supper is a celebration of the presence of God in their midst. It ushers them into communion with the Father and with their brothers and sisters. It feeds and nourishes their souls as well as anticipates the day when they will dine with Christ in the Kingdom of God.

? Why is it significant that Jesus told His disciples that His body and blood would be given “for you”?

Jesus said, “This is my body, which is given for you,” and, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” The key phrase there is for you. Jesus’ body was beaten, lashed, pierced, struck, and broken for you. Jesus’ blood poured forth from His body from the crown of thorns, the three nails, and the soldier’s spear for you.

The Lord's Supper is a reenactment of Christ's reconciling work. The Lord's Supper is a retelling of that old, old story upon which Christians have hung all of their hopes. When Christians take the Lord's Supper, they are reminded of God's promises about what would happen to the Messiah: "You will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15), and, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

 What benefit does this retelling have for Christians?

The Supper strengthens and refreshes the souls of believers. It benefits them because when they preach the gospel to themselves and to each other they are edified and unified. Even Christians need to hear the gospel. Consider the fact that Paul always rehearsed the gospel message in his letters when he wrote to churches. This reminds us that the gospel message isn't only necessary for salvation, but it is also necessary for sanctification.

When Christians participate in the Lord's Supper, their faith is nourished, their souls are encouraged, and their hearts are humbled. Furthermore, when they participate in the Lord's Supper, these things happen alongside their brothers and sisters in Christ, and they are knit together with them with the stitches of gospel truths.

 **Application:** In what ways is the gospel preached when the Lord's Supper is observed? Have you viewed the Lord's Supper in this way or is this a new perspective for you?

2. Worthy Recipients of the Supper (1 Cor. 11:27-32)

? According to the passage, who was reclining at the table with Christ? Who partook of the Lord's Supper? Why is this significant?

The text says that Jesus' close disciples, the apostles, were with Him to celebrate the first observance of the Lord's Supper. An important, practical question that pastors and church members must consider is the question of who should be permitted to take the Lord's Supper today. Is participation in the Lord's Supper a personal thing that should be decided in one's own heart, or should church leadership take an active role in encouraging some to take it while prohibiting others?

? In 1 Corinthians 11:27-32, what did Paul say about the manner in which a person should partake of the supper?

The key phrase in this passage is, "Let a person examine himself" (v. 28a). Paul explained to the Corinthian church that it was possible for Christians to eat in an "unworthy manner" (v. 27). He said anyone who ate in an unworthy manner was sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. This is a very serious thing. Indeed, a bit later he said that it was because of this unworthy eating that some had died (v. 30).

In verses 17-22, Paul explained in detail what he meant by eating in an unworthy manner. Apparently, some of the church members in Corinth were abusing the Lord's Supper. First of all, he pointed out the divisions that were among them. And, it seems, that these divisions were leading to chaos, selfishness, and offense when they observed the Lord's Supper. We must keep in mind that the Lord's Supper was more like a full meal at this time. Paul said, "When you come together, then, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For at the meal, each one eats his own supper. So one person is hungry while another gets drunk!" (1 Cor. 11:20-21).



What lessons can we learn from the Corinthian church's poor example? Who should take the Lord's Supper today?

Factions had grown up in the church and cliques had formed. Offense, attacks, lies, rumors, backbiting, and hatred ran rampant in the Corinthian church. Gospel driving love and forgiveness was in short supply apparently. These immature Christians were nursing hurts and were allowing seeds of bitterness to take root. This sort of atmosphere is hard on pastors, but they must work diligently to deal with sin and lead Christians to reconcile and to love one another with the love of Christ.

Further, the Lord's Supper is intended for Christians only. It is a farce and a mockery if someone who remains an enemy of God participates. Therefore, pastors must protect the integrity and purity of the Lord's Table by humbly and gently prohibiting unbelievers from partaking in the bread and the cup.

Paul later wrote to the Corinthian church: "Do not be yoked together with those who do not believe. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6:14-15). Unbelievers are unfit and unable to enjoy communion with Christ and are therefore unworthy of the Lord's Table. As long as a person remains in a condition of rebellion against God, he or she should not be permitted to partake in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.



Application: How do you seek for the unity of the church and actively work against division, gossip, and complaining? What can you do to grow in communion with fellow church members?

3. The Purpose of the Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26)

- ?** What did Jesus say about the purpose of the Lord's Supper? Why were His followers to continue to take it? Does the Lord's Supper add anything to Christ's atoning work? Explain.
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Jesus told the disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me." (v. 19) The Lord's Supper is a central element in the lives of Christians, especially their formal worship in their local assembly. However, the Lord's Supper isn't effective to supplement Christ's work on the cross. First Peter 3:18 says that Christ "suffered for sins once for all." Jesus Christ died once for all for those who would believe upon him. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of Christ's atoning work as well as a means of fortifying our faith in Him. However, it cannot save. In fact, those who participate in the Lord's Supper with unrepentant hearts eat and drink judgment on themselves.

- ?** According to Paul's account of the Lord's Supper, Jesus referred to the bread as His body. How has this idea been interpreted throughout Christian history?
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Jesus' expression, "This is my body," has been widely interpreted throughout church history. Roman Catholics claim the bread and wine literally become the body of Christ (transubstantiation), while Lutherans claim that the body and blood of Jesus are "in, with, and under" the bread and wine (consubstantiation). Most Protestants take the phrase to mean that Jesus is present symbolically, though present spiritually with the believer as well.

Before we partake of the Supper, we should examine our attitudes and motives. For example, do we hold a grudge against someone? Since Jesus taught reconciliation with a fellow Christian as a precondition for offering a gift to God (see Matt. 5:23-24), we can do no less before we participate in the Lord's Supper. What is our motive

for participating? Is the act an empty ritual that we perform just to keep from being different from those seated around us? Are we afraid of what others may think if we fail to partake? Paul's instructions regarding the Lord's Supper apply to all kinds of corporate worship. We always need to approach God in worship with humility and sincerity of heart.

? Application: When do you tend to approach worship or a part of the worship experience, such as the Lord's Supper, too lightly? What are some ways we can help each other guard against those complacencies and habits?

Conclusion

All Christians ought to be committed to a local church that practices the Lord's Supper regularly. The Lord's Supper is a special and unique activity that local churches ought to observe continually because the Scriptures command it. Along with baptism, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of positive command from God Himself. In other words, local churches are obligated to observe the Lord's Supper. It isn't a suggestion. It isn't optional. Local churches should continue to practice this ordinance until Jesus returns.

The Lord's Supper is included in the short list of positive commands given to the church in regards to formal times of worship. Since the time of the Reformation, the churches and denominations that have sought to live as closely to the Bible as possible have taken a "regulative" approach to public worship. Those that hold to this view are careful about what activities they permitted in formal times of worship. In the Bible there are several activities commanded in public worship: the preaching of the Word, the public reading of the Word, praying, singing, baptizing, and observing the Lord's Supper.

The importance and place of the Lord's Supper in the life of the gathered church has rarely been in question. All churches that hold to the Bible as their standard observe it. It is undeniable that Jesus instituted this practice as a means for His people to regularly remember His saving work on their behalf.

 As you reflect on what Christ has done for you, what are your feelings? What is an appropriate response to His sacrifice?

 What will you do this week to reflect the change Christ has made in you? How should this impact your relationships with others, both inside and outside of the church?

 How can you use the story of the Last Supper and its elements to share Jesus with someone?

CHRIST CONNECTION: The death of Christ on the cross is retold when Christians partake of the Lord's Supper. The bread symbolizes His body that was broken; the cup signifies His blood that was shed.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: When Christians partake of the Lord's Supper they aren't only built up in faith and spurred on to joy, but they are also reminded of their commission to go and make Christ known among the nations.



FOR NEXT WEEK

To Seek and Save

Main Passages

- Luke 19:28-44 (Luke 19:10)

Session Outline

1. He Came (Luke 19:10, 28-37)
2. To Seek (Luke 19:10, 38-40)
3. To Save (Luke 19:10, 41-44)

Memorize

And he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."²⁰ In the same way he also took the cup after supper and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

- Luke 22:19-20, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Luke 22:1-6
- Tuesday - Luke 22:7-13
- Wednesday - Luke 22:14-23
- Thursday - Luke 22:31-34
- Friday - Luke 22:39-46
- Saturday - Luke 22:54-62